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# **Gorbachev and the New Soviet Agenda in the Third World**

Francis Fukuyama

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This report, part of a study of the types of threats that Army planners might encounter in the Third World, evaluates the impact that Mikhail Gorbachev has had thus far on Soviet Third World policy, as well as prospects for future evolution. The study evaluates new Soviet thinking on foreign policy and measures the changes in rhetoric against actual Soviet behavior. It analyzes the new Soviet emphasis on the large states of the Third World. As an example of this new Soviet diplomacy, it presents a detailed case study of Soviet policy toward the Persian gulf in 1986-1987.

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# **Gorbachev and the New Soviet Agenda in the Third World**

Francis Fukuyama

June 1989

Prepared for the  
United States Army

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## PREFACE

As part of its research into non-NATO contingencies, the Arroyo Center has undertaken a study of the types of threats that Army planners are likely to encounter in the Third World. This study, entitled "Moscow and the Future Third World Threat Environment," examines the broad changes brought about or promised by Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, as well as other aspects of Soviet policy including trends in power projection capabilities, use of proxy forces, and Soviet policy in specific regional cases.

This report attempts to evaluate the impact that Gorbachev has had thus far on Soviet Third World policy, as well as prospects for future evolution. The study evaluates new Soviet thinking on foreign policy and measures the changes in rhetoric against actual Soviet behavior. It analyzes the new Soviet emphasis on the large states of the Third World; as an example of this new Soviet diplomacy it presents a detailed case study of Soviet policy toward the Persian Gulf in 1986-1987. The case study is meant to complement others in the overall project. The conclusions of this report draw not only on the source materials noted but on the findings of the other components of the project as well.

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## SUMMARY

### GORBACHEV'S SIGNIFICANCE

The reformist leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev raises the question of the degree to which Soviet foreign policy toward the Third World has changed, or is likely to change in the near to medium term future.

There are at least three levels of change that we can evaluate. At the highest level would be long-term changes in Soviet strategic objectives, in particular with reference to Soviet expansionism and the degree to which that expansionism is driven by ideology.

A second level of change would be changes in the tactics by which a given set of strategic objectives is achieved in the short run. Tactical changes can include fairly significant policy shifts, such as the type of allies sought by the Soviet Union or the level of risk and cost that Moscow is willing to bear in pursuit of its policy objectives, even if the latter remain constant.

The most superficial level of change would be stylistic—in the rhetoric and “feel” of Soviet diplomacy.

### “NEW POLITICAL THINKING”

Gorbachev and his lieutenants have elaborated a radically new agenda for Soviet foreign policy, which suggests important changes in long-range objectives. Under the rubric of “new political thinking,” Gorbachev has stressed themes like:

- “Common human values” rather than class interests as the basis of Soviet foreign policy,
- The unworkability and immorality of nuclear deterrence,
- The mutuality of security and need to abandon zero-sum thinking as the norm in international relations,
- The importance, alongside national security, of new global issues such as environmentalism and economic interdependence,
- The defensive character of Soviet military doctrine and “reasonable sufficiency” as a defense planning criterion, and
- The priority of internal economic reform over foreign policy.

Apart from criticisms of U.S. policy, “new political thinking” lowers the importance of the Third World and suggests that the Soviet Union will devote fewer resources to Third World clients in the future.



In parallel with this "soft" version of new thinking there is what we might call a "hard" variant, which assumes a continuity in strategic objectives but recommends shifts on a tactical level. A number of Soviet officials and theorists have suggested that the Soviet Union should cultivate relations with large, geopolitically important Third World states, regardless of their ideological orientation. The group most often cited includes countries such as India, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) states and the conservative states of the Persian Gulf.

This shift toward "capitalist-oriented" states arises out of a sense of frustration with the ideologically sympathetic Marxist-Leninist client states acquired during the late Brezhnev years (e.g., Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua), which have proven to be weak, backward, and lacking in basic political legitimacy. Those Soviet officials advocating a turn to the "capitalist" Third World, including Karen Brutents (first deputy chief of the Central Committee International Department) and Aleksandr Yakovlev (formerly Propaganda Chief and now a full member of the Politburo and head of the Foreign Policy Commission), regard this shift as an essentially competitive strategy designed to exploit and exacerbate conflicts of interest between the United States and other Western countries, on the one hand, and powerful emerging Third World states on the other.

### **THE NEW AGENDA IN THE THIRD WORLD**

There is considerable evidence that the Soviets have already changed their tactics along the lines recommended by Brutents and Yakovlev. In virtually every region of the world, their diplomacy since Gorbachev came to power has emphasized big, "capitalist" Third World states. For example,

- The Soviets have promoted their relationship with India (a client since the 1950s) as a model for Soviet-Third World relations, and the Soviets have made great efforts to expand their economic and military ties there.
- Soviet foreign minister Shevardnadze visited Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay in 1987, and there are plans for a Gorbachev visit to these states plus Mexico—the first such visit by a Soviet general secretary.
- Similarly, Moscow has paid a great deal of attention to ASEAN, stepping in with an offer to buy Thai rice in the wake of a Thai-U.S. trade dispute.

- The area of heaviest Soviet involvement with capitalist Third World states has been the Middle East/Persian Gulf. Moscow has opened diplomatic relations with Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, moved closer to Saudi Arabia and Iran, rescheduled Egypt's large military debt, and made feelers to Israel with the ultimate purpose of reestablishing diplomatic relations with that country.

There is less evidence of changes in Moscow's strategic goals, particularly with regard to the competitive and expansionist aspects of Soviet policy. Some aspects of "new thinking," particularly those arguing that the USSR has moved beyond power politics, are difficult to take seriously, whereas others, such as the priority of domestic over foreign policy, seem quite credible. "New thinking" should be understood as an adaptation to Moscow's constrained environment, in which it needs resources and an absence of distractions in order to concentrate on domestic reform.

It is useful to establish a series of tests or criteria by which we can measure future Soviet behavior, both as indicators of change in long-term strategic goals, and to keep ourselves honest in future evaluations. In order of significance, some tests would be:

- Unilateral Soviet withdrawals from one or more of the "forward" positions occupied by them during the late 1960s and 1970s, such as Mongolia, the Kurile Islands, Angola, Afghanistan, Vietnam, or Nicaragua.
- An end to the gratuitous ideological warfare that at every turn attacks American policies and institutions.
- Failure to seize new opportunities for expanded influence that may arise—for example a call for assistance by the NPA in the Philippines.
- Changes in the internal Soviet political and economic order, which would tend to reduce the role of ideology in Soviet society as a whole.

### **NEW SOVIET DIPLOMACY IN THE PERSIAN GULF**

Soviet behavior in the Persian Gulf in 1986-1987 is a useful test of the new Soviet diplomacy, because it was one of the first initiatives presided over by the Gorbachev team and because it was the one regional conflict in which the prospects for a real degree of U.S.-Soviet cooperation were possible. Unlike other conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli conflict or the struggle over Cambodia, the Soviet Union and

the United States were not locked into support for opposite sides in the Iran-Iraq war: in fact they had parallel interests in seeing a negotiated settlement of the war.

A shift in Soviet tactics was readily apparent in Soviet diplomacy in the Gulf. Moscow's offer to lease three tankers to Kuwait in response to the latter's request for protection in early 1987, as well as Moscow's subsequent tilt toward Iran, was very much in keeping with the Brutents-Yakovlev emphasis on the "capitalist" Third World. Moscow's policy also demonstrated considerable flexibility and sophistication, as the Soviets balanced complex and competing interests on both sides of the Gulf. Finally, the new emphasis on conservative Third World states entailed a change in the policy instruments used by the Soviets. While Moscow continued to supply arms to Iraq and deployed the Soviet navy in the Gulf, much of its policy rested on political and economic levers, such as its ability to appear as a relatively even-handed mediator in the war, and its offers of economic cooperation with Iran.

On the other hand, there was little evidence that the Soviets had in any way abandoned zero-sum thinking or their traditional quest for marginal advantage at the expense of the United States. Soviet policy was dominated not by the interest that Moscow shared in common with the United States of seeing a negotiated end to the war, but in the first instance by the desire to preempt the United States in responding to the Kuwaiti request and then by the desire to drive the U.S. Navy from the Gulf after it became clear that the United States was serious about its reflagging effort. This may in part have been a response to the strict zero-sum approach taken by the Reagan Administration. Nonetheless, the collaborative option, which would have been relatively painless for the Soviets, was not tried except in late 1987-early 1988 as a means of undercutting the unilateral U.S. naval presence.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ARMY POLICY

There is clear evidence of stylistic changes in Soviet policy, with Moscow abandoning its traditional heavy-handed style for one that is much more cosmopolitan and "modern" in character.

On the level of tactical changes, Soviet willingness to bear risks and, to a lesser extent, costs of empire seems to be decreasing. In the short run, the threat of military intervention that the United States will face from the Soviet Union in the Third World should be significantly lower than it was in the late Brezhnev period. This is not to say that an intervention will not occur if the Soviets feel that fundamental interests are being threatened, but "optional" interventions for

marginal gains are less likely. The terms of the U.S.-Soviet competition in the Third World have already begun to shift away from military instruments to means that are more economic and political in nature.

The Soviets passed the first of the tests listed above for change in strategic aims when they began their withdrawal from Afghanistan in May 1988. The significance of a withdrawal should not be overestimated insofar as the primary reasons for the Soviet retreat have to do with the sharply deteriorating military and political situation in Afghanistan, and there are precedents in Soviet history. On the other hand, such a withdrawal will have major implications regarding the tactical question of Soviet tolerance for costs and risks, and suggests a shift away from the ideological and expansionist goals of the late Brezhnev period. 1988 has also seen progress toward settlement of the conflicts in Angola and Cambodia, in which the Soviets appear to have played a moderating role, giving further support to the reality of "new thinking."

These trends if they continue will have concrete implications for Army planning in various parts of the world. For example, the traditional Persian Gulf scenario in which the Soviets seize northern Iran is less likely to materialize than previously; the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) might better plan against contingencies involving local actors, or ones in which the Soviets operate indirectly. In the Middle East, the Soviets are less likely to provide massive support to an Arab war effort against Israel, as they did in 1973. In Central America, the ambitious plans for building up the Nicaraguan armed forces revealed by the Sandinista defector Major Miranda may never materialize; in particular, the Soviets are unlikely to provide MiG jets to Managua.

But even as the Soviet propensity to intervene is going down, the potency of non-Soviet threats in the Third World is rising, given the increasing sophistication of regional armed forces. Powerful states like Argentina, Israel, South Africa, and Iran have already succeeded in constraining superpower options considerably. Such states may be easier than the USSR to deal with militarily, but they present special political problems for the United States. Use of U.S. military forces against non-Soviet Third World states will be constrained by domestic and international political considerations in ways that would not apply to a Soviet opponent.

The U.S. Army will, however, continue to play an important role in the provision of traditional military assistance and training to Third World friends and clients.

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## I. GORBACHEV'S SIGNIFICANCE

The rise to power of a new Soviet leader would normally be sufficient occasion for a careful examination of changes in Soviet policy, both those that have occurred already under his tenure and those that are likely to take place in the future. This is all the more true when that leader announces and begins to put into effect sweeping shifts in domestic and foreign policy, as Mikhail Gorbachev has done, and when the leadership change involves not just a few individuals at the top but an entire generation of officials.

There has been a striking change in the rhetorical content of Soviet foreign policy under the rubric of "new political thinking." Gorbachev and his lieutenants have spoken about the mutuality of international security, and have for the first time admitted that Soviet policy can threaten other countries. Gorbachev has announced a new agenda for international politics, in which traditional national security concerns take second seat to issues such as disarmament, international economics, and environmental protection. Soviet spokesmen have asserted that "zero-sum" thinking, in which a gain for one superpower is automatically a loss for the other (and vice versa), is growing obsolete, and ought to be replaced by an emphasis on areas of mutual concern. Indeed, "common human values" have replaced "class conflict" in defining Soviet foreign policy objectives. In the military sphere, the Soviets have begun to speak of using "reasonable sufficiency" as the criterion for force planning, suggesting that they would be satisfied with a much more modest defense structure. Perhaps more important in the long run than any of these changes is the remarkable absence of ideological language or analysis in the words of Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, Dobrynin, and other senior Soviet officials, implying that Marxism-Leninism is no longer a powerful motive force for Soviet expansionism.

Such changes, were they to come to genuinely characterize Soviet foreign and defense policy, would certainly constitute highly positive developments, not only for the United States but for all countries lying under the shadow of Soviet power. A cursory survey of Soviet behavior in the years since Gorbachev came to power does indeed reveal the beginnings of a shift in policy, the most obvious example of which was the start of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in May 1988. On the other hand, in spite of a professed Soviet concern to reduce the financial burden of its "empire," Moscow has in other cases continued to increase the level of resources devoted to its clients.

The debate over the reality of "new thinking" is extremely difficult to resolve for a number of reasons. In the first place, the subject of interpretation is not merely unknown but in a certain sense unknowable, because it is constantly changing. Gorbachev's own thinking has gone through a rather remarkable evolution over the past three years. His early ideas on economic reform were a confused mishmash of centralizing and decentralizing initiatives. They were given considerably greater coherence, however, with the promulgation of the new enterprise law at the June 1987 Central Committee plenum, and the introduction of "full economic accountability" (*khozraschet*) at the beginning of 1988, as well as new initiatives to promote the cooperative movement—essentially the free enterprise sector—and to return to private family farming later that year. In 1985 Gorbachev praised Stalin, whereas by late 1987 in his speech on the 70th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution he publicly attacked him.<sup>1</sup> By now, few of those who dismissed Gorbachev as nothing more than "Brezhnev with a birthmark" in the first year of his rule are prepared to do so any longer.

Even if one could convincingly establish the intentions of the Soviet leadership, their ability to carry out changes on the scale proposed will depend on the outcome of a complicated and uncertain political process. Indeed, the Western interpretational debate has already shifted from the question of Gorbachev's sincerity and reform-mindedness, to whether he will be able to successfully surmount the tremendous resistance engendered by his policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. It is reasonable to assume that many aspects of Gorbachev's foreign policy agenda are as controversial as his domestic reforms, and will depend heavily on the outcome of the internal Soviet political struggle. Change, moreover, need not proceed in a single direction: the dismissal of Gorbachev's putative ally Boris Eltsin from the Moscow Gorkom and Politburo in October 1987, the increasingly vocal opposition to Gorbachev expressed in the runup to the 19th Party Conference in June-July 1988, as well as the earlier precedent of the reversal of the Khrushchevian thaw of the late 1950s, suggest that the system is capable of regressing as well.

A different sort of interpretational difficulty concerns the fact that some of the evidence relevant to our evaluation of change in Soviet behavior is negative, i.e., concerns things which have not occurred. For example, Soviet Third World policy in the late Brezhnev years was characterized by a series of opportunistic interventions in which the Soviets used military power to support their political interests. Indeed, it

<sup>1</sup>See Michel Tatu, "Seventy Years After the Revolution: What Next?" *Radio Liberty Research*, RL 426/87, October 26, 1987.



was the trend line of increasing activism and the new precedents set for the use of force that were particularly disturbing to U.S. policymakers. The 1980s have not seen interventions comparable to Angola, the Horn of Africa, or Afghanistan. This quiescence in itself would constitute a major shift in Soviet policy, but it is not clear whether it is due to a deliberate policy choice on the part of Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders, or to the absence of attractive opportunities for intervention. The best measure of the current Soviet propensity to project power may not be the rising cycle of violence in places like Angola in early 1988—since this is for Gorbachev an inherited commitment into which the USSR has already sunk considerable prestige—so much as their reactions to new opportunities to expand their influence through relatively low-cost interventions, should they arise. But such opportunities come up infrequently, and are often hard to detect.

For all of these reasons it would be both difficult and unwise for us to try to arrive at a definitive judgment of Gorbachev's foreign policy in the Third World. What we can do instead are two things. First, we can present an analytical "snapshot" of the changes that have taken place in Soviet policy to date, and assess how meaningful those changes have been. Second, we can establish criteria for evaluating future change. Such benchmarks would provide a useful check both on Gorbachev and on ourselves, so that we neither give him undue credit for purely rhetorical shifts, nor fail to recognize real change by constantly raising our performance standards.

It is particularly important in this stage of U.S.-Soviet relations that we separate analysis of developments in the Soviet Union from policy advocacy. Recognition of the possibility of significant changes in Soviet strategy and tactics is not inconsistent with recommendation of an essentially cautious or conservative U.S. policy toward Moscow. Western observers have prematurely announced the death of communism or the mellowing of the Soviet system too often in the past, and it is reasonable that Americans not give Moscow the benefit of the doubt but demand to see concrete changes first.

In this report, we will begin by examining the changes that have occurred in Soviet foreign policy rhetoric. These include the concepts that fall under the heading of "new political thinking" proper, as well as the shift in emphasis to the "capitalist" Third World. As will be seen, "new thinking" implies shifts in long-term goals, a process that is only beginning; on the other hand, there is considerable evidence that the more tactical turn toward the "capitalist" Third World has already been implemented in many parts of the world. The study will then examine one particular case in detail for what it can tell us about the

character of the new Soviet diplomacy—that of Soviet involvement in the Persian Gulf in 1986-1988. The report will conclude by drawing implications of these findings for Army and broader U.S. policy.

## II. THE NEW POLITICAL THINKING

### DEFINITIONS

The themes and ideas that go under the heading of "new political thinking" were given their first major articulation in Gorbachev's address to the 27th CPSU congress in February 1986, a little less than a year after he became General Secretary. Since then, they have become a staple of the foreign policy speeches not only of Gorbachev but of foreign minister Shevardnadze and former International Department head Dobrynin.<sup>1</sup>

The precise themes falling under this rubric vary with speaker and audience, but generally they include the following:

- "Common human values" are more important than class interests and class conflict as the basis for Soviet foreign policy.
- Mankind faces an acute danger from nuclear weapons; deterrence is not a solution to the nuclear dilemma but part of the problem.
- Security is mutual; it cannot be attained unilaterally through military or technological means, but rather must result from a collaborative political process. "Zero-sum" thinking is obsolete.
- The world has become complex and interdependent; states must face "global problems" transcending national boundaries such as economic interdependence and environmental concerns.
- The complex and multifaceted nature of international relations creates a special requirement for foreign policy flexibility and compromise.

Flowing from the redefinition of the concept of national security, "new thinking" encompasses a number of changes in military doctrine and policy, including:

- A strong reiteration of the position taken by the Soviets since Brezhnev's 1977 Tula speech that Soviet military doctrine is purely defensive, that nuclear wars are unwinnable and should never be fought.

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<sup>1</sup>For a general account of "new thinking," see Charles Glickham, "New Directions for Soviet Foreign Policy," *Radio Liberty Research*, Supplement 2/86, September 6, 1986; and Viktor Yasmann, "'The New Political Thinking' and the 'Civilized' Class Struggle," *Radio Liberty Research*, RL 292/87, July 29, 1987.

- Use of the concept of "reasonable sufficiency" as a criterion for defense planning.

Finally, other points are perhaps not "new thinking" in the strict sense but have been repeatedly stressed by Gorbachev:

- The Soviet Union is beginning a period of internal reconstruction and needs a peaceful international environment so that it can concentrate on its domestic agenda.
- Neither Gorbachev nor the Soviet Union has a monopoly on the truth.

Most striking is Gorbachev's emphasis on "common human values" as the basis for Soviet foreign policy, rather than promotion of the interests of the international proletariat. This was stated frankly in the General Secretary's speech to the United Nations General Assembly in December 1988:

Today, further world progress is only possible through a search for universal human consensus as we move forward to a new world order. . . . [The diverse character of social development in different countries] calls for respect for the views and positions of others; tolerance; a willingness to perceive something different as not necessarily bad or hostile; and an ability to learn to live side-by-side with others, while remaining different and not always agreeing with others. . . . The new phase calls for de-ideologizing relations among states. We are not abandoning our convictions, our philosophy or traditions, nor do we urge anyone to abandon theirs. But neither do we want to be hemmed in by our values. That would result in intellectual impoverishment, for it would mean rejecting a powerful source of development—the exchange of everything original that each nation has independently created.

The stress on tolerance and the idea that the Soviets should not be "hemmed in by our values" is, of course, a formulation that has more in common with classical English liberalism than with Marxism or, for that matter, Leninism. It represents an overt break with a long tradition in Soviet foreign policy of emphasis on the "class character" of international relations—i.e., the promotion of communist revolution, and fundamental division of the world into socialist and imperialist camps.

An equally prominent element of "new thinking" is its extended attack on the workability and morality of nuclear deterrence. Gorbachev has never admitted the possibility of stable nuclear deterrence at either minimal or extended levels, but rather has insisted that the peril remains as long as any nuclear weapons exist: "the policy of deterrence, considered in a historical context, does not reduce the risk

of military conflict. In fact, it increases that risk."<sup>2</sup> Nor does Gorbachev profess to be happy about the prospect of a world made safe for conventional weapons. He has made an argument in principle that "the contemporary world has become too small and fragile for wars and policies of force." According to Gorbachev, power politics has become obsolete: the earth cannot be saved "unless a resolute and irrevocable break is made in the way of thinking and acting which for centuries was based on the acceptability and admissibility of wars and armed conflict."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, much of the "new political thinking" is overtly pacifist in nature, arguing that weapons themselves cause conflict. It is not surprising then that Gorbachev is led to advocate universal and complete disarmament and a totally demilitarized world as the ultimate aim of Soviet foreign policy. This implies a very great change in the Soviet Union's self-conception as a superpower as well: "the Soviet Union is willing and ready to renounce its nuclear power status and reduce all other armaments to a minimum reasonable amount."<sup>4</sup>

The goal most likely served by this aspect of "new thinking" is actually not so new. Soviet proposals for general and complete disarmament have a long history, as do their attempts to exploit the nuclear danger. These initiatives serve the Soviet political interest of undercutting Western defense programs through an appeal to pacifist and antinuclear sentiment there, as the Soviets attempted to do by encouraging the freeze movement during the 1982-1983 anti-INF (Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces) campaign. The United States and its military-industrial complex "remain the locomotive of militarism." What is new in this rhetoric is Gorbachev's wholesale adoption of Western pacifist rhetoric and modes of analysis when talking about the arms race, his explicit assertion that the demilitarized world he seeks includes the Soviet Union, and his tendency to play down the positive role of the Soviet armed forces in "defending the gains of socialism."<sup>5</sup>

The Soviet stress on interdependence and the mutuality of security seems to be similarly aimed at undermining the legitimacy of Western defense programs, particularly the Reagan Administration's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). It is for this reason that the "new thinking"

<sup>2</sup>"For a Nuclear-Free World, for the Survival of Mankind," FBIS-SOV, February 17, 1987, p. AA 20. Anatoly Dobrynin developed several of these points in a 1986 article, asserting that the policy of mutual deterrence was invented by the United States, but that "the USSR has never considered this situation normal." "For a Nuclear-Free World as We Approach the 21st Century," *Kommunist*, No. 9, June 1986.

<sup>3</sup>Report to the 27th CPSU congress, in FBIS-SOV, February 26, 1986, p. O 29.

<sup>4</sup>"Nuclear-Free World," p. AA 23.

<sup>5</sup>Indeed, the Soviet military received only passing mention in the 27th congress address, when Gorbachev praised the armed forces for carrying out "their duty with dignity in the most complicated and sometimes severe situation." 27th congress report, p. O 28.

continually attacks technological solutions to the security problem, and inveighs against states which seek to preserve "an eternal status quo." Interdependence in the new Soviet lexicon means in the first instance "the inseparable unity of historical destinies of all countries in the world in the face of a possible nuclear conflict," whose inhabitants are coming "to the logical conclusion that the time has come to end their subordination to the element of the nuclear arms race."

On the other hand, a genuinely new element of Soviet rhetoric is the admission that *Soviet* forces can and have threatened other countries, and that this is also a problem that needs to be addressed. This necessitates recasting Soviet military doctrine in a purely defensive manner, such that "no one has any grounds for fears, even if they are imagined, for their security."<sup>6</sup> The fact that such a rewriting of military doctrine is a task for the future implies that the old doctrine as it evolved under Gorbachev's predecessors did indeed create a real (if only imaginary) sense of threat.

Both Khrushchev and Brezhnev, of course, referred to the mutual peril of the nuclear age and stressed the need for peaceful coexistence and détente. But these leaders laid equal stress on the competitive aspect of détente—that is, the fact that détente was meant to regulate only the most dangerous military aspects of the East-West conflict, while permitting pursuit of the political and economic aspects of the competition, particularly in the vital area of the Third World. Gorbachev's rhetoric, by contrast, sharply plays down the competitive nature of the East-West relationship across the board, in favor of emphasis on areas of potential collaboration. The new party program adopted at the 27th party congress in 1986 made no reference to peaceful co-existence as a specific form of class struggle, as had earlier formulations.<sup>7</sup>

Probably the most innovative aspect of "new thinking" is the extension of the interdependence theme beyond security to include other "global problems" such as economic security and environmental pollution. It is of course quite ironic that Soviet spokesmen should be speaking in this fashion given the USSR's isolation from the world economy and its record on environmental questions. Nonetheless, we have Gorbachev sounding like a spokesman for the Club of Rome a decade earlier, making assertions to the effect that

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. O 30.

<sup>7</sup>This is referred to by Andrey Kozyrev in "Confidence and the Balance of Interests," *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, No. 10, October 1988.

analysis of yet another group of contradictions—those on a global scale, affecting the very foundations of the existence of civilization—leads to serious conclusions. This refers first of all to pollution of the environment, the air and oceans, and to the exhaustion of natural resources.<sup>8</sup>

What is significant about this theme is not the substantive agenda the Soviets propose (an agenda whose content is far from clear), but rather the fact that such “non-class” questions are being raised at all. For the rhetoric about “global problems” assumes that there are issues which transcend ideology, and suggests that socialist countries like the Soviet Union have in fact not decisively resolved problems of social equity and pollution which plague the West. In theory, “globalism” opens up new areas of mutual interest in which cooperation between countries with diametrically opposed social systems is possible.

The “de-ideologization” of Soviet foreign policy is further suggested by Gorbachev’s assertion that “We do not claim to know the ultimate truth.” This kind of self-skepticism is of course quite un-Marxist, though its appeal is diminished considerably by Gorbachev’s use of the general principle that no one can have a monopoly on the truth to criticize unnamed powers who would pose as a “self-appointed supreme judge of the whole world.”<sup>9</sup>

Another new element in Gorbachev’s rhetoric is his repeated assertion that the primary item on the Soviet Union’s agenda is *perestroika* and internal reform, not foreign policy, and that the chief objective of foreign policy is the creation of an international environment that will permit the USSR to turn inward safely. The Soviet General Secretary first suggested this idea in his interview with *Time* magazine shortly after taking office, and repeated it at greater length in early 1986:

I state with full responsibility that our international policy is more than ever determined by domestic policy, by our interest in concentrating on constructive endeavors to improve our country. This is why we need lasting peace, predictability, and constructiveness in international relations.<sup>10</sup>

Shevardnadze made a similar point and tied foreign policy more directly to economic concerns:

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. O 8.

<sup>9</sup>“Nuclear-Free World,” pp. AA 19, 24. Gorbachev expands on the theme of uncertainty in the section of his book entitled “We Have No Ready-Made Formulas.” *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), pp. 65–74.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. AA 17.

The most important thing is that the country should not incur additional expenditure in connection with the need to maintain its defense capability and protect its lawful foreign political interests. . . . We must enhance the profitability of our foreign policy and achieve a situation in which our mutual relations with other states burden our economy to the least possible extent and create a stable psychological atmosphere in which Soviet citizens can work in peace.<sup>11</sup>

Such statements are interesting admissions of weakness and explain one of the motives underlying "new thinking."

It is difficult to take the more radical elements of "new thinking" seriously as a statement of the present Soviet leadership's *Weltanschauung*. The frankly pacifist rhetoric that denies the legitimacy of power politics is wholly out of keeping with a political culture that still runs according to the rules of *kto kogo*—that is, the perpetual struggle for personal political power at the expense of one's rivals. While Gorbachev may want to avoid an arms race in space, he certainly recognizes that the Soviet Union is taken seriously as a superpower only because of its arsenal of nuclear and conventional weapons. Even a completely de-ideologized and un-Marxist Soviet Union is still going to have to worry about national power and prestige and, like China or France or Britain, will have interests and responsibilities around the globe. A radically new political agenda which promoted global issues like environmentalism over national security would not be credible coming from the mouth of a Western leader, and is far less so when the speaker still claims to be a follower of Lenin.

On the other hand, there is no reason why "new thinking" need be accepted or dismissed as a whole, since it encompasses a wide range of ideas. A broader view of Gorbachev's agenda suggests that he is being perfectly straightforward in asserting that domestic reform has priority over foreign policy—at least for the time being—and that Soviet leaders are now questioning a wide range of assumptions that guided their policy in all areas of endeavor, without necessarily coming up with clear-cut answers. Soviet abandonment of strongly held positions regarding both INF and Afghanistan contain an implicit recognition of earlier mistakes, a critique that has become explicit in the Soviet press, particularly in the third year of Gorbachev's rule.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Vestnik Ministerstva Inostrannykh Del SSSR*, No. 2, 1987, as quoted in Viktor Yasmann, "The New Soviet Thinking in Regional Conflicts: Ideology and Politics," *Radio Liberty Research*, RL 493/87, December 3, 1987.

<sup>12</sup> See for example, Vyacheslav Dashichev's critique of Brezhnev's foreign policy in his articles "East-West: In Search of New Relations," *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, May 18, 1988, and "Roads Which We Choose," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, June 19, 1988.



In a country, moreover, where ideology has played such an important role, rhetoric in and of itself is significant in defining attitudes and can take on a momentum of its own. "New thinking" gives those officials and specialists involved in Third World policy leave to formulate it on a "non-class" basis, something which a number of them had been doing for some time anyway but without official sanction.

Indeed, the "non-class" character of "new thinking" appears to be a matter of some controversy between conservatives and reformers within Gorbachev's Politburo. This was made plain in a speech given in Gorkiy by the party's former second secretary and leading conservative, Yegor Ligachev, in mid-1988. While denying that there was any opposition between proletarian interests and "general human" interests, he stated that

we proceed . . . from the fact that international relations are particularly class in character, and that is of fundamental importance. Any other way of putting this question introduces confusion into the consciousness of our people and our friends abroad. Active involvement in the solution of general human problems, and primarily the struggle against the nuclear threat, by no means signifies any—I would say—artificial braking of the social and national struggle. It does not mean that class contradictions and antagonisms are being ignored.<sup>13</sup>

The "other way of putting this question" apparently refers to "new thinking." Ligachev was perhaps responding to a Shevardnadze speech that had been given to a conference held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a couple of weeks earlier, in which he made the remarkable assertion that

new political thinking views peaceful coexistence in the context of the realities of the nuclear century. We are fully justified in refusing to see in it a special form of class struggle. One must not identify coexistence, which is based on such principles as nonaggression, respect for sovereignty and national independence, noninterference in internal affairs and so on, with class struggle. The struggle between two opposing systems is no longer a determining tendency of the present-day era. At the modern stage, the ability to build up material wealth at an accelerated rate on the basis of front-ranking science and high-level techniques and technology, and to distribute it fairly, and through joint efforts to restore and protect the resources necessary for mankind's survival acquires decisive importance.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>FBIS/SOV, August 8, 1988, from Moscow television on August 5.

<sup>14</sup>*Pravda*, July 23, 1988. A fuller version of this speech is given in *Vestnik Ministerstvo Inostrannikh Del SSSR*, No. 15, August 1988, pp. 27-46. In this speech Shevardnadze also made remarks critical of past Soviet foreign policy: "A direct and open analysis of the history of Soviet foreign policy reveals the natural influence that the deformations in the country's internal life had on our line in international affairs." With regard to the Third World, Shevardnadze explains that Afghanistan started a "chain reaction."

It is difficult to know the specific cause of the debate between Ligachev and Shevardnadze over whether Soviet foreign policy has a "class basis" or not. It could well mask a more specific dispute over policy toward places like Afghanistan and Angola, for which "class basis" is a code word referring to aid levels to local Marxist-Leninists and the like. On the other hand, Ligachev's complaint could simply be over the rhetoric being used by people like Shevardnadze, which is almost completely un-Marxist.

The debate over "common human values" vs. class interests was not settled through discussion, but by Ligachev's demotion at the September 1988 plenum, in which whatever responsibility he may have had for foreign policy was given to Yakovlev. The victory of the Shevardnadze line was then confirmed by Gorbachev's UN General Assembly speech in December. Nonetheless, Ligachev's dissent from "new thinking" is a useful reminder that so radical a departure in Soviet foreign policy has not gone down entirely smoothly, and could resurface as an issue at some time in the future.

### **NEOGLOBALISM: NEW THINKING AND THE THIRD WORLD**

How then does the "new thinking" apply to the Third World and regional conflicts? There are in effect two answers to this question. On the broadest level, new thinking implies a significant scaling back of the Third World's priority in the overall Soviet foreign policy agenda. The new Soviet rhetoric is preoccupied above all with disarmament and the nuclear arms race as its first order of business. There is a striking absence of discussion of Third World issues—except as problems for Soviet policy—in the speeches and writings of senior Soviet officials. In the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras it was common for the general secretary and other senior leaders to appraise positively and in some detail Soviet relations with various "progressive" states in the developing world, to applaud new advances such as the Cuban or Vietnamese revolutions, and to take note of Soviet support, including military assistance, to Third World clients.

This type of rhetoric is almost entirely gone from Soviet pronouncements. Gorbachev's 27th party congress address, for example, did not contain a separate section on the Third World, and did not mention any of Moscow's clients apart from the "running sore" of Afghanistan.<sup>15</sup> The contrast between his report and that of Brezhnev at the

<sup>15</sup>27th congress report, p. O 31. The early section of the report talks about the Third World's economic development problems and such issues as the Latin American debt crisis. In addition, Gorbachev mentions Soviet-Indian relations in passing.

26th party congress in 1981, who spoke at length on the "liberated countries," is marked.<sup>16</sup> Another example is Gorbachev's speech to the Soviet foreign ministry in May 1986. The first task of Soviet diplomacy, according to Gorbachev, is to "help in the country's domestic development" and to guarantee peace, "without which everything else would lose its meaning." After mentioning the importance of relations with the socialist bloc, China, Europe, the Asia-Pacific region, and disarmament questions, the summary of the speech has the general secretary devoting a single sentence to the Third World, in which he says, "The time has also come to consider as a comprehensive whole our economic pledges with respect to the Third World."<sup>17</sup> This comment suggests that the first consequence of a turning inward of Soviet foreign policy would be a reduction in subsidies for some of Moscow's expensive Third World clients.

To the extent that proponents of "new thinking" do deal with the Third World, it is treated not as an arena for the advance of socialism, but rather as a problem area in East-West relations. Soviet spokesmen refer to the possibility that Third World conflicts will lead to escalation and a superpower military clash, a theme in the specialist literature for some time. The world, according to Dobrynin, has become extremely complicated and "multidimensional," with states interacting in a variety of unforeseen ways in different parts of the world. The Reagan Administration, on the other hand, has been pursuing a policy labelled "neoglobalism," which seeks to reduce this complex reality to an obsolete ideological struggle.

Finally, there is the question of local conflicts. Here as well we are facing a number of problems requiring a deeper study. This includes political doctrines, such as the notorious "strategy of neoglobalism" of the United States, which is essentially aimed at fanning local conflict for the sake of revenge.<sup>18</sup>

Neoglobalism refers primarily to the so-called "Reagan Doctrine," that is, the Reagan Administration's unannounced policy of providing military and economic support to various guerrilla forces fighting in

<sup>16</sup>See the analysis in Francis Fukuyama, "Gorbachev and the Third World," *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1986.

<sup>17</sup>"Time for Restructuring," May 23, 1986; summary reprinted in *Vestnik Ministerstva Inostrannykh Del SSSR*, No. 1, August 5, 1987, as translated in FBIS-SOV-87-170, September 2, 1987, pp. 23-25. Gorbachev devotes a chapter in his book *Perestroika* to the Third World, but uses it primarily to reassure Western readers that the Soviet Union has no designs inimical to their interests there.

<sup>18</sup>In other words, while recognizing the contemporary world's complexity, Soviet spokesmen continue to lay the greater share of the blame for Third World instability at the United States' doorstep.

Soviet-sponsored radical states, including the *contras* in Nicaragua, the Afghan *mujahideen*, and Jonas Savimbi's UNITA in Angola. The United States, according to Soviet analyses, having overcome the "Vietnam syndrome," is now prepared to get involved in virtually all Third World conflicts.<sup>19</sup> Neoglobalism is, of course, roundly condemned and contrasted to the sophistication and maturity of "new thinking." Local conflicts are all said to have local causes, though few Soviet analyses proceed further to offer a solution to them.

Soviet academics have carried the analysis of neoglobalism much further. One article published in 1988 identifies this strategy as one intended to undermine the international positions of the USSR through a favorable ratio of costs to damage inflicted:

The USA skillfully exploits the fact that in "low-intensity conflicts" it is much cheaper to support guerrillas than the government. . . . The USSR spent on military operations in Afghanistan five billion rubles annually, while the USA spent not more than one billion dollars annually on its support for the Afghan anti-governmental forces, or almost six to eight times less. According to Western estimates, approximately the same ratio of American and "induced" Soviet expenditures exists in conflicts involving Nicaragua, Kampuchea, Ethiopia, and Angola.<sup>20</sup>

These authors conclude that the USSR must be more selective in choosing goals and commitments abroad and feel that "it would be expedient to gradually abandon our global rivalry with the USA and refrain from the costly support of unpopular regimes, political movements, parties, etc."

Apart from this analysis of the problems of the Third World, however, the senior level proponents of "new thinking" do not seem to have a specific agenda for dealing with regional conflicts and other Third World problems. For example, Gorbachev and other Soviet spokesmen have frequently mentioned the Latin American debt crisis, calling it a "time bomb" which could have "desperate results," yet this assertion seems to contain no particular implication for Soviet policy. Certainly, the USSR has no intention of stepping in and offering its own resources as an alternative. "New thinking" similarly does not seem to offer much of a response to the challenge presented by the

<sup>19</sup>The first Soviet use of the term "neoglobalism" came in response to a 1984 Anthony Lewis column in the *New York Times* in which he spoke of the Reagan Administration's "new globalism." It has been used synonymously with the term "state terrorism" to denounce any U.S. display of force, such as the bombing of Libya in 1986. See Bohdan Nahaylo, "State Terrorism" and "The New Globalism"—The Soviet Distortion of Language for Political Purposes," *Radio Liberty Research*, RL 174/86, April 29, 1986.

<sup>20</sup>Aleksey Izyumov and Andrey Kortunov, "The Soviet Union in the Changing World," *International Affairs*, August 1988.

Reagan Doctrine and U.S. "neoglobalism," of either a threatening or conciliatory nature.

Indeed, the only real point of interface between the major themes of "new thinking" and regional conflicts is the stress on negotiation, compromise, and political solutions as the proper means of addressing regional conflicts. According to Dobrynin, "The new type of political thinking presumes a qualitatively higher level of foreign policy flexibility and readiness to make sensible compromises with one's partners in the talks."<sup>21</sup> This admonition, however, is directed primarily at Washington, which remains the root cause of most conflicts. The Soviets have in fact laid greater stress on certain regional negotiations, including an international conference to settle the Arab-Israeli dispute, an all-Asian security conference, various meetings on regional confidence-building measures, and proposals for nuclear-free zones and zones of peace, and the like. But these initiatives are perhaps the least interesting part of the "new thinking" agenda: many of them have been long-standing staples of Soviet foreign policy, and have not been accompanied by changes in substantive position and strong diplomatic support of the sort that characterized the INF or Afghanistan negotiations.<sup>22</sup>

### **BRUTENTS, YAKOVLEV, AND THE CAPITALIST THIRD WORLD**

There is a second theme in recent Soviet theoretical writings on the Third World which is associated with very real changes in Soviet policy that have already taken place during the Gorbachev years. This theme is the need to broaden Soviet ties to include the larger and more populous states of the Third World, even if their socio-economic systems happen to be capitalist. Strictly speaking, the shift in emphasis to the capitalist states of the developing world is not on the list of points usually associated with "new thinking," although it shares with the latter the components of tactical flexibility and deemphasis of ideology.

This policy has received official sanction by being included in the new party program drafted in late 1985 and adopted at the 27th party congress. In referring to the Third World, the program states that

<sup>21</sup>"For a Nuclear-Free World as We Approach the 21st Century," *Kommunist*, No. 9, 1986.

<sup>22</sup>There have been a number of new wrinkles or nuances in many of the Soviet proposals under Gorbachev. For example, the all-Asian security conference is less blatantly designed to isolate China, but seems intended rather to cut the USSR into the Pacific community. Soviet proposals to restart an international conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict have been accompanied by real measures to improve relations with Israel, short of reopening full diplomatic relations. Other initiatives, however, like Soviet support for the Raratonga Pact or other Pacific nuclear-free zones, are calculated to do nothing more than impede the operations of the U.S. Navy in that ocean.

the practice of the USSR's relations with the liberated countries has shown that real grounds also exist for cooperation with young states which are travelling the capitalist road. There is the interest in maintaining peace, strengthening international security, and ending the arms race; there is the sharpening contradiction between the people's interests and the imperialist policy of diktat and expansion; and there is the young states' realization of the fact that political and economic ties with the Soviet Union promote the strengthening of their independence.<sup>23</sup>

It should be noted that the formulation in the party program remains confrontational and zero-sum. The capitalist Third World is to be cultivated because of "contradictions" between it and the imperialist West; there is no talk of mutual interests and renovated agendas.

The intellectual origins of this shift go back to the Brezhnev years and seem to lie primarily with two men, Karen Brutents and Aleksandr Yakovlev. Brutents has been deputy head of the Central Committee's International Department since the mid-1970s and as first deputy chief since September 1988 has overall responsibility for the Third World in this crucial bureau. Brutents' earlier writings showed little enthusiasm for promoting socialist-oriented countries like Afghanistan or Angola, and in a series of articles written in the early 1980s he argued that the Soviet Union should pay greater attention to large, geopolitically important Third World countries regardless of ideological orientation, states like India, Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil.

The other important figure for whom the capitalist Third World has been a theme is Aleksandr Yakovlev. Yakovlev's career has undergone a meteoric rise, from exile as ambassador to Canada in the Brezhnev years to directorship of the Institute for the World Economy and International Relations (IMEiMO) under Andropov, to chief of the Central Committee Propaganda Department under Gorbachev, where he played a large role in the formulation of the policy of *glasnost*, and finally to candidate and then full Politburo membership in 1987. In September 1988, he was made head of the newly created commission on foreign policy, with oversight responsibilities for Soviet foreign policy as a whole.<sup>24</sup>

Yakovlev's writings on international relations, beginning from his time at IMEiMO, have stressed the importance of "multilateralizing" Moscow's foreign relations, in place of the heavy concentration on bilateral U.S.-Soviet relations that characterized Soviet diplomacy in the

<sup>23</sup>Draft party program translated in FBIS supplement, October 28, 1985, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup>For more on Yakovlev's background, see Alexander Rahr, "Soviet Propaganda Chief's Unexplained Absence," *Radio Liberty Research*, RL 447/86, December 2, 1986, and Julia Wishnevsky, "Aleksandr Yakovlev and the Cultural 'Thaw'," *Radio Liberty Research*, RL 51/87, February 5, 1987.

Gromyko years. That is, the Soviet Union ought to pay greater attention to the states of Western Europe, China, Japan, and other major powers, using them as sources of leverage over the United States. On the Third World specifically, he arrives at a list of target countries similar to that of Brutents.

Among the consequences engendered by the operation of the law of unevenness in our age is the appearance of sufficiently strong young national capitalist states—the “new industrializing countries”—which are at the same time both the object and agent of economic expansion. They—for instance, Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico—have their own monopolistic groups, in certain cases capable of entering the struggle against the “old” industrial empires. . . .

One must suppose that in the historically foreseeable future, the centrifugal trend—toward the growth of interimperialist contradictions and the further splintering of the monocentric capitalist world of the postwar decades—will actively resist the centripetal forces.<sup>25</sup>

Yakovlev's perspective remains confrontational and bipolar in many respects—a rather odd position for someone who has emerged as the leading liberal in Gorbachev's Politburo. He argues in favor of multilateralization only in part because of the inherent importance of these countries. Their chief significance derives instead from the “contradictions” between these countries and the United States that Moscow can seek to exploit.

Neither Brutents nor Yakovlev advocate a policy of retrenchment, nor do they argue for anything like a benign neglect of the developing world while the USSR concentrates on domestic development.<sup>26</sup> Rather, they call for an activist Soviet policy which looks for conflicts of interest between the Third World and the West, and seeks to turn them to Soviet advantage. What is, however, very different in their line when compared to Soviet policy in the late Brezhnev period is their almost total disregard for the Marxist-Leninist part of the Third World. Neither of them seems to have much faith in the prospects of genuine socialist societies springing up in the developing world—Brutents in fact has argued repeatedly that progress toward socialism will be excruciatingly slow—and neither seems to give ideological objectives much weight in overall Soviet foreign policy.

<sup>25</sup>Aleksandr Yakovlev, “Interimperialist Contradictions—The Contemporary Context,” *Kommunist*, No. 16, November 1986 (translated in FBIS, December 12, 1986, annex, p. 7).

<sup>26</sup>The latter position, which Galia Golan has identified as the “Soviet Union first” argument, is characteristic of Gorbachev's language and of his predecessor and patron, Yuriy Andropov. See Galia Golan, *The Soviet Union and National Liberation Movements* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988).

In addition, the policy instruments that would be used to achieve the Brutents-Yakovlev strategy are rather different from those used to secure the advances of the 1970s. Geopolitical positions like Angola, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, or Nicaragua were gained largely through Soviet ability and willingness to make use of various forms of military power, including arms transfers, Cuban and East European proxy forces, and in extreme cases direct intervention by Soviet forces. The same instruments would be useless in garnering greater influence with large, powerful Third World states like Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina. Almost by definition, such states are more stable and secure, and therefore not in need of the package of internal and external security measures that Moscow has offered in the past. Rather, Soviet policy would have to be based on a congruence of political and economic interests—that is, shared anti-Americanism, interest in disarmament, trade disputes with the United States or other Western countries, and the like. This in itself would imply a Soviet foreign policy that was competitive but not confrontational in any military way, which in itself would be a major change from the Brezhnev years.

There are, in effect, two types of new thought in Moscow at the present moment. One is tempted to call what is officially labeled “new political thinking” the soft-headed version, and the Brutents-Yakovlev line the hard-headed one. The first is soft-headed insofar as it purports to change the very objectives of Soviet foreign policy and, ultimately, transform the Soviet Union into a gigantic Switzerland. Ideological goals are largely dethroned and replaced with non-political, global concerns transcend national boundaries, military power is castigated and power politics delegitimized as an appropriate element of international behavior, and a heavy emphasis is placed on common interests and mutual understanding. The hard-headed version, by contrast, retains the traditional ideological goal of competition with the United States, but pursues it by different means, through flexibly cultivating influence among the “regional influentials” of the world. The soft version would seek to end regional competition in favor of peace and domestic reconstruction, whereas the hard version would simply shift the grounds and the means of competition.

### INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS

The themes of “new thinking”—the soft version—did not spring full-blown from the pen of a Gorbachev speechwriter or propagandist, but had their origins in the writings of a number of Soviet academics dating as far back as the late Brezhnev era. By the 1970s, Soviet



scholars in institutes like IMEiMO and the Institute of the USA and Canada already had good access to Western writings on economics, international relations, and related questions. It is not surprising that a number of ideas popular among Western academics at the time, such as interdependence, the existence of "global" problems, the "complexity" of contemporary interactions among states, the declining utility of military power in the nuclear age, and the like, should have been imported along with Western rock music and clothing styles. The themes of "new thinking" became a staple of certain Soviet academic writings years before Gorbachev began using them publicly.<sup>27</sup>

The de-ideologization of Soviet foreign policy has been a long time in the making. Earlier efforts by Western observers to declare ideology dead in the Soviet Union<sup>28</sup> have obviously been premature: Soviet promotion of Marxist-Leninist vanguard parties in the 1970s was but one testament to the durability of ideological ways of thinking. Nonetheless, erosion of confidence in Marxism and in the viability of the USSR's "real" or "developed" socialism as a model for other countries on the part of the Soviet elite has been building steadily throughout the post-war period. There is, for example, a crucial difference between Khrushchev's support for bourgeois nationalists in the 1950s and the current Brutents-Yakovlev line. Khrushchev genuinely believed that Nasser's Egypt, Nehru's India, and Nkrumah's Ghana could skip the capitalist stage of development and blossom, within a generation, into full-fledged socialist societies modeled on the Soviet Union. On the other hand, it is safe to say that at present virtually no one in the Soviet Union thinks that Mexico, Brazil, India, or the ASEAN states are likely to turn communist anytime in this generation, or even the next. Already in the mid-1960s a variety of Soviet specialists on the Third World<sup>29</sup> were criticizing Khrushchev's optimism and noting that most of Moscow's developing world allies were more nationalist than socialist in character.

While the flurry of Marxist-Leninist regimes coming to power in the 1970s led to a brief revival of optimism, their poor performance subsequently occasioned even graver doubts as to whether real socialism lay in store for any of them. As one reportedly authoritative recent Soviet article explained,

<sup>27</sup>For an account of the intellectual origins of "new thinking," see Glickham (1986), pp. 7-10.

<sup>28</sup>The most famous was Daniel Bell's *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: The Free Press, 1962).

<sup>29</sup>Including Karen Brutents and Nodari Simoniya, a section head in the Oriental Institute.

Nor does our all-people's state have any weighty grounds to be in a state of class confrontation with the United States or any other country, unless of course we proceed from the absurd theory of permanent revolution. . . . The myth that the class interests of socialist and developing countries coincide in resisting imperialism does not hold up to criticism at all, first of all because the majority of developing countries already adhere to or tend toward the Western model of development, and second, because they suffer not so much from capitalism as from a lack of it.<sup>30</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Sino-Soviet split gave powerful impetus to Moscow's support for radical Marxist-Leninist regimes and other progressive Third World forces as a means of blocking China from assuming the mantle of leadership in the world communist movement. But China's radical reversals in foreign and domestic policy in the 1970s and its repudiation of Maoism stripped the ideological conflict with the Soviets of any meaning.

Gorbachev's *perestroika* in the long run represents the final nail in the coffin of an ideologically based foreign policy. A number of the economists around Gorbachev such as Aganbegyan and Zaslavskaya have recognized for some time now that the Soviet Union's economic difficulties were not fixable through greater discipline and tinkering at the margins, but could only be resolved through fundamental structural reform. Although the Soviet leadership has been careful to continue to pay lip service to socialism as an ideal, in practice it has been chipping away at that system's ideological underpinnings. For example, the new laws on enterprises, cooperatives, and family farming contradict many of the premises of the centrally planned economy handed down from Stalin. The new cooperatives law envisions the "marketization" of a significant sector of the economy, and Gorbachev by rehabilitating Bakharin and the NEP (New Economic Policy) has virtually repudiated the forced collectivization of agriculture in the 1930s.

With regard to the Third World specifically, the Stalinist model of economic development has been under attack for over a decade now.<sup>31</sup> Soviet economists are these days prone to advise their Third World clients to proceed cautiously in centralizing their economies, to remain open to the global capitalist system, and to retain mixed economies with both socialist and market characteristics. Some Western observers have gone so far as to suggest that writers on Third World economic development were launching an esoteric critique of the Soviet

<sup>30</sup>Andrey Kozyrev, "Confidence and the Balance of Interests," *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'*, No. 10, October 1988.

<sup>31</sup>For evidence, see Elizabeth K. Valkenier, *The Soviet Union and the Third World: An Economic Bind* (New York: Praeger, 1983).

economic system itself.<sup>32</sup> Although this interpretation is overdrawn, it is clear that many Soviet specialists have lost confidence in the value of their own society as a model for other people. To the extent that this is true, the Soviets would have a diminished incentive to spread communism to the Third World, quite apart from the practicality of their doing so.<sup>33</sup>

The "hard-headed" new thought of Brutents and Yakovlev is actually one of the oldest adaptations in the Bolshevik tactical lexicon, that is, the shift to a broad united front strategy of alliance with non-communist forces. The specific origins of the most recent shift lie in the broad reassessment of Third World policy that began in the late Brezhnev era.<sup>34</sup> Soviet strategy in the 1970s was characterized by a strong emphasis on support for radical, ideologically sympathetic Marxist-Leninist national liberation movements or parties, such as those that came to power in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, South Yemen, and Nicaragua. This strategy yielded Moscow several important geopolitical gains in various parts of the world during the late Brezhnev years, such as the naval base at Cam Ranh Bay or port facilities in Aden. But as time went on, it was evident that the Soviets had saddled themselves with a group of politically weak and economically costly clients, many of which were plagued with persistent anti-communist insurgencies. By the late 1970s a number of Soviet specialists had taken note of the poor prospects of many of these states, and implicitly suggested that Soviet policy might more profitably cultivate stronger (though ideologically less orthodox) countries. This position seems to have found support from those in the political leadership like Andropov, who for financial reasons believed that the Soviet Union's own needs should have much higher priority over those of its Third World clients.

It is possible to place both the "leftist" move toward promotion of radical Marxist-Leninist clients during the 1970s and the Brutents-Yakovlev "rightist" strategy of alliance with powerful non-communist states in the context of the periodic left-right shifts that have characterized Soviet policy since the Bolshevik revolution.<sup>35</sup> In earlier decades the Soviets sought to improve the quality and staying power of their

<sup>32</sup>See Jerry Hough, *The Struggle for the Third World* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1986).

<sup>33</sup>This change in Soviet academic thinking is described in Elizabeth Valkenier, "New Soviet Thinking About the Third World," *World Policy Journal*, 1987.

<sup>34</sup>For a fuller account of this rethinking, see Francis Fukuyama, *Moscow's Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World*, The RAND Corporation, R-3337-USDP, February 1986.

<sup>35</sup>See Francis Fukuyama, "Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy," *Problems of Communism*, September-October 1987.

local allies by insisting on ideological orthodoxy, as in the Comintern's notorious "Third Period" from 1928 to 1935, or during the so-called *Zhdanovshchina* of the early Cold War, when Moscow abandoned its bourgeois socialist and social democratic allies. Focus on narrow, ideologically correct allies has frequently been counterproductive from the standpoint of Soviet interests, and "left" periods have therefore tended to give way to a broadening of alliances. This is what happened during the 1935-1939 period of the Popular Front, or in Khrushchev's opening to "bourgeois nationalists" like Nasser and Sukarno. The Brutents-Yakovlev strategy is in many ways only the latest iteration of this cycle. Reacting against the narrowly based Marxist-Leninist clients accumulated during the late Brezhnev years, the hard-headed version of new thought argues for a return to broad alliance with anyone with grievances against the United States. Unlike the "soft" version of new thinking, the turn to the capitalist Third World can be placed squarely in the historical tradition of Soviet tactics and strategy.

The willingness of the Soviet political leadership to adopt either the hard or soft versions of new thinking had at least one common root, however, in the sense of economic crisis that emerged in the late 1970s-early 1980s, and which underlies Gorbachev's *perestroika*. The soft version states explicitly that the Soviet Union intends to turn to internal economic reconstruction and has less energy and resources available for external engagements. The hard version implies the same, and leads to a similar policy consequence. One of the major criticisms of emphasis placed on Marxist-Leninist clients in the Brezhnev era was their lack of economic viability—the fact that many, from Vietnam and Cuba to Angola and Afghanistan, could not stand on their own feet and needed heavy Soviet subsidies to keep going. The turn to the larger non-communist states in the developing world is likely to be far less costly for the Soviets, since whatever economic relations the Soviets develop with them are likely to be bilateral trade and investment rather than one-way subventions.

## BUREAUCRATIC AND PERSONNEL CHANGES

The sorts of theoretical shifts described above would be less impressive were they not accompanied by changes in the personnel responsible for implementing any sort of new policy. At the highest levels of the Soviet leadership, the changes have been striking: three and a half years after Gorbachev's succession, only Ukrainian first secretary Shcherbitskiy and Gorbachev himself remain on the Politburo from the Brezhnev days. One important change that was a necessary condition

for Gorbachev's de-ideologized foreign policy was the death of Mikhail Suslov in 1981. Long the ideological standard-bearer and "conscience" of the party, Suslov protected a number of key specialists in the bureaucracy and seems to have played an important role in encouraging Soviet support for radical states and movements in the Third World.<sup>36</sup>

The whole membership of the current Politburo is not, of course, necessarily enamored of "new thinking." Those likely to be fully supportive are Gorbachev, Yakovlev, Shevardnadze and Medvedev. But there is now quite clearly a conservative faction, led by Yegor Ligachev, whose dissent from the more radical aspects of *glasnost'* and *perestroika* became evident with the sacking of Moscow Gorkom secretary Boris Yeltsin in October 1987 and the publication of the Nina Andreyeva letter in April 1988. The most serious areas of disagreement between "liberals" and "conservatives" in the senior leadership concern domestic policy issues such as the limits of *glasnost'* and historical revisionism, but it is quite likely that they are split on foreign and defense policy matters as well. Clear evidence of this appeared in Ligachev's August 1988 speech in Gorkiy, noted above, in which he criticized by implication "new political thinking."<sup>37</sup> Ligachev's influence within the Politburo and over foreign policy specifically were dramatically reduced after the September 1988 Central Committee plenum, but it is not hard to imagine, however, that Ligachev's views are reflected in an important stratum of the party and state bureaucracies, and that under the right circumstances they might once again receive political expression.<sup>38</sup>

Apart from the Politburo, the most important organizations responsible for the conduct of Soviet foreign policy are the foreign ministry, the new foreign policy commission established after the September 1988 plenum, and within the Central Committee Secretariat, the International Department.<sup>39</sup>

Since Gorbachev's coming to power, the entire foreign policy apparatus has undergone extensive organizational and personnel changes. The most notable structural reform came with the creation of a new foreign policy commission, one of six established at the

<sup>36</sup>See, for example, reports of his role in the decision to intervene in Afghanistan.

<sup>37</sup>See Ligachev's speech in Gorkiy, August 5, 1988; and the analysis in Sec. V below.

<sup>38</sup>Most likely under conditions of a clear-cut failure of Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika*. We should not exclude the possibility, however, that an external failure could also contribute to the revival of the conservatives' standing.

<sup>39</sup>After the September 1988 reorganization, the former department for liaison with socialist countries and the department for foreign cadres have apparently been incorporated into the new International Department.

September 1988 plenum. The specific functions and responsibilities of this commission have yet to be defined or revealed, though it presumably will absorb some of the old responsibilities of the International Department as a supervisor and integrator of foreign policy in its broadest outlines. The new commission is headed by Aleksandr Yakovlev, whose views were described in part above. His appointment presumably underlines the fact that "new thinking" has become the dominant line, in view of any questions that might have been raised concerning its status by Ligachev's Gorkiy speech.

From the content of his speeches, foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze clearly places himself among the new thinkers. His appointment, and the speeches he and Gorbachev gave to the senior Soviet diplomatic service in May 1986, indicate a firm intention by the political leadership to give Soviet foreign policy a completely new and more modern look.<sup>40</sup> Gorbachev was reportedly unhappy with longtime foreign minister Gromyko's reputation as "Mr. Nyet," and hoped to revitalize Soviet diplomacy through the rapid promotion of younger, more cosmopolitan officers. Shevardnadze at the same meeting was explicit about what he felt was a certain stagnant mentality within the diplomatic corps:

[W]e must carry out intrabranh and intraministerial democratization in such a way as to eliminate the soil for all kinds of Bonapartism, the striving to trample on as many people as possible, to act arrogantly, to give the appearance of being indispensable, infallible, and close to the wielders of power in this world. . . . Unfortunately, this is where we encounter two basic problems. Some workers have such a heavy work load that they physically do not have time for self-education. Others make no attempt to build up their professional potential.<sup>41</sup>

While almost all recent new appointments have come from within the ranks of the professional foreign service, several changes suggest a desire to shift political direction. An example of this was the removal of Mikhail Kapitsa as deputy foreign minister, who in the course of his

<sup>40</sup>Besides Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, the meeting was attended by Central Committee Secretaries Anatolyy Dobrynin, Vadim Medvedev, and Aleksandr Yakovlev, as well as officials in charge of Foreign Cadres, Science and Technology, and Foreign Economic Relations. See the analysis of the meeting in Alexander Rahr, "Winds of Change Hit Foreign Ministry," *Radio Liberty Research*, RL-274/86, July 16, 1986, and Serge Schmemmann, "Gorbachev Gives Critique of Soviet Foreign Policy," *New York Times*, May 24, 1986.

<sup>41</sup>"The Rate of Restructuring in USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Light of the Tasks Advanced by M. S. Gorbachev at the Ministry-Wide Conference in May 1986 and the Results of the January 1987 Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee," in *Vestnik Ministerstva Inostrannykh Del SSSR*, No. 1, August 5, 1987, as translated in FBIS/SOV, September 2, 1987, p. 28.

earlier responsibilities for the Asia-Pacific region had alienated the Chinese and other Asian governments.<sup>42</sup> Eleven new deputy foreign ministers have assumed office since Gorbachev's ascent, including the two first deputy foreign ministers, Yuliy Vorontsov and Anatoly Kovalev.<sup>43</sup> Of particular interest is the appointment of Vladimir Petrovskiy as deputy foreign minister in charge of international organizations and the Middle East. Petrovskiy has published rather more widely than most career diplomats, and has promulgated a fairly soft-line view on non-proliferation and other topics.<sup>44</sup> The corps of ambassadors has seen extensive turnover as well, although in many cases such positions are used as convenient parking places for "old thinkers."<sup>45</sup>

The changes that have taken place in the International Department are of particularly great moment because of that body's historical role in promoting revolutionary change around the world. The successor to the Comintern, the International Department is responsible for relations with non-ruling communist parties, national liberation movements, peace fronts and the like, and in the late Brezhnev years pushed Soviet policy toward stronger support for Marxist-Leninist movements and regimes.<sup>46</sup> Both the former head of the International Department, Boris Ponomarev, and its former deputy in charge of Third World affairs, Rostislav Ul'yanovskiy, were hard-line ideologues whose early careers dated back to the Comintern of the 1930s. These two retired in 1986, and Ponomarev was replaced by the long-time Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin. Dobrynin in turn brought over first deputy foreign minister Georgiy Kornienko to serve as his deputy in the International Department next to Vadim Zagladin.

<sup>42</sup>Kapitsa was made director of the Oriental Institute in preference to the Far East Institute, where he would still have had an opportunity to offend the Chinese.

<sup>43</sup>Vorontsov in particular is said to share much of Gorbachev's perspective. See Philip Taubman, "Vorontsov, a New Breed of Diplomat," *New York Times*, August 5, 1987. In October 1988 Vorontsov was appointed ambassador to Afghanistan, apparently to oversee the final phase of the Soviet withdrawal from that country.

<sup>44</sup>See Glickham (1986), pp. 12-13. Petrovskiy was evidently the author of Gorbachev's speech, "The Realities and Guarantees of a Secure World," September 17, 1987. In addition to those mentioned, new deputy ministers include Ivan Aboimov, Anatoly Adamishin, Aleksandr Bessmertnykh, Boris Chaplin, Vadim Loginov, and Valentin Nikiforov. In October 1988, Viktor Karpov, formerly head of the ministry's section on arms control and disarmament, was appointed deputy foreign minister. Vorontsov, while remaining first deputy foreign minister, is new ambassador to Afghanistan.

<sup>45</sup>Examples include Leonid Zamyatin, formerly head of the Central Committee Propaganda Department, now ambassador to England, Andrey Aleksandrov-Agentov, formerly personal assistant to Leonid Brezhnev, now ambassador at large, and Anatoly Blatov, another aide to Brezhnev, now ambassador to the Netherlands.

<sup>46</sup>This is documented in Arkady Shevchenko, *Breaking with Moscow* (New York: Knopf, 1985).

Brutents, whose views were always less ideological than those of Ul'yanovskiy, inherited the overall Third World portfolio.<sup>47</sup> After the September 1988 plenum, Dobrynin was removed and later made a personal foreign policy advisor to Gorbachev, and replaced by Valentin Falin, former head of the Soviet news agency Novosti and a longtime foreign policy specialist on Germany.<sup>48</sup> Both first deputy chiefs Zagladin and Kornienko were removed (Zagladin having been made another personal foreign policy advisor to Gorbachev), and was replaced by Karen Brutents. The International Department itself was reorganized to include the former Liaison with Socialist Countries and Foreign Cadres Abroad Departments. Although this implies an expansion of the size and duties of the International Department, the overall intent of the September 1988 reorganization was to reduce the size and influence of the Central Committee apparatus in the day-to-day running of policy. While personnel cuts may be proportionally smaller in the International Department than in the Central Committee economic departments, given its small size to begin with, its lowered stature is suggested by the fact that its new head has not been made a Central Committee Secretary as were Ponomarev and Dobrynin.<sup>49</sup> The department will in any case be supervised and overshadowed by the foreign policy commission.

One traditional complaint about the International Department has been that it has promoted support for radical Third World clients without particular regard for the impact of such support on U.S.-Soviet relations and Soviet relations with the West in general. This was presumably not a mistake either Dobrynin or Falin were likely to make, both men being specialists in the cultivation of Western public opinion. While it would be incorrect to make Dobrynin out as any kind of friend of the United States, his speeches tend to be unideological in tone when compared with those of his predecessor,<sup>50</sup> and he has

<sup>47</sup>In the reorganization of the International Department that took place in 1985, a new position was created to deal with arms control issues, to which a military officer, Lt. Gen. Viktor Starodubov, was appointed.

<sup>48</sup>Falin spent most of his career in the foreign ministry, where he was involved in European affairs and in the early 1970s became ambassador to Bonn. He also worked with Andropov in the Liaison Department of the CPSU Central Committee in the 1950s, and was first deputy head of the International Information Department in the late 1970s.

<sup>49</sup>See Georgiy Kruchkov's explanations of the changes within the Central Committee apparatus just after the September plenum, quoted in FBIS/SOV, September 30, 1988, p. 33.

<sup>50</sup>See, for example, Dobrynin's article, "The Main Social Force of the Contemporary Period," in which he notes that the nature of the working class is changing substantially from the days of Lenin, and before him Marx, because it includes fewer and fewer manual workers and more in service industries or whose work is mainly "mental." Nonetheless, he concludes, modern capitalism continues to exploit workers. *Kommunist*, No. 16, November 1986, translated in FBIS-SOV, December 8, 1986.



no history of interest in the Third World. Speculation has been that Falin's appointment signals a shift toward a more European orientation to Soviet foreign policy, in line with Yakovlev's overall emphasis on powerful international actors other than the United States. Whether this is correct remains to be seen; but Falin no more than Dobrynin seems to have an interest in Third World Marxist-Leninist countries.

One common characteristic of many of the new senior foreign policy appointees is their knowledge of American affairs. In addition to Dobrynin himself, the International Department's former first deputy chief Georgiy Kornienko served under Dobrynin in the embassy in Washington in the early 1960s.<sup>51</sup> Vorontsov served as counselor and then minister-counselor under Dobrynin in Washington, Petrovskiy was the head of the U.S. section of the Administration for Foreign Policy Planning in the foreign ministry, and Aleksandr Bessmertnykh, another new deputy minister, served both in the Washington embassy and as head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' America Department.<sup>52</sup> (One of the holdover deputy ministers, Viktor Komplektov, appointed first by Andropov, also served in the Washington embassy, and was deputy head and head of the MFA America section.)<sup>53</sup>

The Department for Liaison with Socialist Countries, which handles Soviet ties with all ruling communist parties, including the People's Republic of China, Vietnam, and Cuba, was incorporated into the new International Department in October 1988. For the two years prior to that, however, leadership of this department was given to Vadim Medvedev, who has subsequently gone on to become a full member of the Politburo and head, since September 1988, of the new commission on ideology. Medvedev, an economist by training, is a "new thinker" and close Gorbachev ally, and will still have influence over foreign policy from his post as ideology czar. Under his tenure at the Liaison Department, a number of personnel changes occurred, the most important being the departure of Oleg Rachmanin as first deputy head. Rachmanin, a China specialist, had developed a reputation as an anti-reform hardliner who delivered a blistering attack on revisionism just

<sup>51</sup>Philip Taubman, "Soviet Diplomacy Given a New Look Under Gorbachev," *New York Times*, August 10, 1986. The most senior Soviet official with detailed personal knowledge of the United States is Aleksandr Yakovlev, who studied briefly at Columbia University and was later ambassador to Canada.

<sup>52</sup>The Americanist background of the new appointees is noted by George Breslauer. See "The Internal Setting of Gorbachev's Third World Policy: Peredyshka or Perestroika?" Paper presented to the CSIS conference on "The Changing Soviet Challenge in the Third World," December 1987.

<sup>53</sup>Central Intelligence Agency, *Directory of USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs Officials*, July 1987.

after Gorbachev took power.<sup>54</sup> He was replaced in late 1986 by a former deputy chief in the same department, Georgiy Shakhnazarov, who in his written work presents a much softer exterior.<sup>55</sup> In early 1988 Shakhnazarov was then transferred to Gorbachev's personal secretariat, as a foreign policy advisor. The bureaucracy as it is incorporated into the International Department is not likely to throw up ideological obstacles to reform programs among Moscow's East European or Third World allies.

In addition to these changes in the formal bureaucracy, Gorbachev has replaced two powerful personal assistants to Brezhnev with foreign policy responsibilities, Andrey Aleksandrov-Agentov and Anatolyy Blatov. Gorbachev's new personal advisor on foreign policy matters is a former deputy chief of the International Department, Anatolyy Chernayev, who formerly had responsibility for European affairs.

The final institution with influence over Soviet Third World policy is the Soviet military. There is some evidence that, in the past, the professional military took a leading position advocating Soviet intervention in support of Third World clients. Instances of this come primarily from the tenure of Marshal Andrey Grechko as minister of defense; there is evidence that he pushed the political leadership into deploying 20,000 Soviet air defense troops to Egypt during the War of Attrition in 1970.<sup>56</sup> In the early to mid 1970s Admiral Sergey Gorshkov, father of the modern Soviet navy, made a strong argument in favor of a power projection navy that could support Soviet political interests around the developing world.

Since the early 1970s, the Soviet military has been much less visible in supporting any kind of distant power projection mission. In the late 1970s-early 1980s, the Soviet military's attention was concentrated on the modernization of forces in the two main theaters in Europe and the Far East. Given the increasing budgetary constraints placed on the military by the political leadership in this period,<sup>57</sup> there is reason to believe that the power projection mission fell in priority, and that the

<sup>54</sup>See the article under the pen name of Vladimirov in *Pravda*, June 21, 1985.

<sup>55</sup>For example, see Shakhnazarov's 1988 article promoting world government, "The World Community Is Amenable to Government," *Pravda*, January 15, 1988, translated in FBIS-SOV, January 22, 1988, p. 11, as well as Aleksandr Bovin's attack on in *Pravda*, February 1, 1988.

<sup>56</sup>It may also be the case that the professional military advocated intervention in Afghanistan—or at least gave the political leadership an overly optimistic assessment of the likelihood of putting down the insurgency—following the visit of General Pavlovskiy to that country in 1979. For specific evidence, see Francis Fukuyama, *Soviet Civil-Military Relations and the Power Projection Mission*, The RAND Corporation, R-3504-AF, April 1987.

<sup>57</sup>On conflicts between the civilian and military authorities in the Soviet Union at this time, see Jeremy Azrael, *The Soviet Civilian Leadership and the Military High Command, 1976-1986*, The RAND Corporation, R-3521-AF, June 1987.

Soviet navy was forced by the general staff itself to give up some of its more ambitious plans for expansion. The Soviets never acquired the logistics and support forces that would be necessary to go beyond existing administrative lift capabilities and to perform armed landings in the manner of the U.S. navy and marine corps.

At the moment, the Soviet military plays a large role in implementing Soviet policy in ongoing conflicts in places like Nicaragua and Angola, and in providing military assistance to a wide variety of Soviet Third World clients. There is little evidence, however, that it plays a major role in political decisions concerning the direction and level of broader policy. Statements by the military's senior leadership under Gorbachev, defense minister Yazov and former chief of staff Akhromeyev,<sup>58</sup> are concentrated on nuclear arms control issues and ignore the Third World, except to criticize U.S. policy. The "liberating mission of the armed forces," once prominent in the speeches of Soviet military spokesmen, has largely disappeared from their lexicon.<sup>59</sup> There is, however, some evidence of tension between the military and those intellectuals most committed to *perestroika*, and it may be that the military's role in the Third World will be a source of future controversy.<sup>60</sup>

This would be particularly true in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Afghan war has been a source of considerable embarrassment to the Soviet military, and they cannot view what amounts to a resounding defeat with particular relish. The failure to reinforce the original contingent of approximately 100,000 men more than marginally was most likely a political decision taken by the party leadership, fearful of being sucked into a gradual, Vietnam-style escalation. The professional military, on the other hand, was likely to have requested substantially larger forces at various points in the war, or else permission to "go to the source" by striking at

<sup>58</sup>Akhromeyev was replaced as chief of staff in December 1988; the views of his successor, Col. Gen. Mikhail Moiseyev, on Third World issues are not known.

<sup>59</sup>See, for example, Chief of Staff Akhromeyev's article, "The Doctrine of Preventing War, Defending Peace and Socialism," in which he limits the doctrine of the Warsaw Pact to the defense of the socialist countries. *Problemy Mira i Sotsializma*, No. 12, December 1987, translated in FBIS/SOV, January 4, 1988.

<sup>60</sup>See, for example, the discussion between defense minister Yazov and a group of writers on Moscow television in early 1988. Yazov attacks a number of writers for their anti-military attitudes, including a story in the journal *Ogonek*. Interestingly, in the same conversation the veteran Soviet military writer, Col. Gen. Volkogonov, asserts that "the Soviet Armed Forces also exist for the purpose of rendering help to progressive regimes and national liberation movements"—the same formulation that was used repeatedly by Grechko. FBIS/SOV, January 20, 1988, p. 73.

*mujahideen* bases inside Pakistan.<sup>61</sup> One can easily imagine a certain backlash in military attitudes if the communist regime in Kabul collapses in a humiliating way and the failure is seen as resulting from the party's failure to back the professional military fully.<sup>62</sup>

Even if the Soviet military had its own agenda for the Third World, it is not clear that their voice would carry much weight. Since the days when Marshal Ogarkov was chief of staff, the military has suffered a number of blows to its prestige that have in effect reduced its potential impact on political decisionmaking.<sup>63</sup>

Decisionmaking on policy toward the Third World thus remains centered in the International Department and Foreign Ministry, with the Liaison Department playing a smaller role. In all three of these institutions, there has been substantial personnel turnover in favor of younger, more cosmopolitan officials, many of whom seem to be allies of Gorbachev and his immediate circle, or else promoters of new ideas in their own right. The bureaucratic basis for a revamped Soviet foreign policy is therefore in place.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THE NEW THINKING

The Soviets have been very adept at turning around and using trendy Western ideas such as interdependence, the mutuality of security, or the multifacetedness of foreign policy as ammunition in their propaganda battle with the United States. They have applied Western concepts and analysis to show that Western policies are obsolete, politically immature, or dangerous. This practice suits a man with Gorbachev's agenda very well: regardless of the substantive worth of the "new political thinking," he is given tremendous credit simply for using such modern vocabulary. The real question, however, is the

<sup>61</sup>To date, there has not been a great deal of evidence on the Soviet military's attitudes toward the Afghan withdrawal, or indeed on the general question of splits within the leadership on this issue. Stephen Sestanovich has pointed out the relatively restrained manner in which defense minister Yazov spoke about the withdrawal in his speech on the 70th anniversary of the Red Army. See FBIS/SOV, February 23, 1988, p. 70; also, Philip Taubman, "Hints of Internal Friction on Afghan Withdrawal," *New York Times*, February 14, 1988.

<sup>62</sup>There is a big step, however, between the military feeling resentful and its actually being able to do something about it politically. In the Soviet Union, the military has not acted as an independent political force, except in support of someone within the party-political leadership who was challenging the current General Secretary.

<sup>63</sup>Blows include the demotion of the defense minister from full to candidate member of the Politburo, after the death of Marshal Ustinov, and the appointment of two relatively weak individuals, Marshal Sokolov and General Yazov, as his successor, as well as the appointment of a very young and relatively unknown successor to Akhromeyev as chief of staff.

extent to which he or other Soviets really believe what he is saying. Has Soviet foreign policy changed, and to what degree is it likely to change in the near future?

We need to define, in the first place, the kind of change for which we are devising tests. In the current Western debate over Gorbachev, there is considerable confusion as to the kind of Soviet Union we may expect in the future. Some observers believe that the rhetorical shifts in themselves imply important changes in Soviet thinking. Others hold Moscow to a much higher standard, and will not be satisfied that the new foreign policy agenda is for real until it becomes a much more "normal" power pursuing "legitimate" interests.

It is perhaps possible to define three levels of change at the outset. The first we might describe as strategic, involving the long-term goals of Soviet foreign policy. These goals, in turn, can be defined by two characteristics. The first concerns whether the USSR continues to be an expansionist power, whereas the second has to do with whether that expansionism is rooted in ideology—that is, whether the Soviet Union bears a greater resemblance to the Third Reich or Wilhelmine Germany (or perhaps, more appropriately, the decaying Austro-Hungarian empire). States that are both expansionist *and* ideological—Republican France, Bolshevik Russia, Hitler's Germany, Mao's China, or Khomeini's Iran—have usually represented the most severe threats to the international order. Their assault takes place both on the level of conventional national power and the plane of ideas. States that want to expand, but which represent no larger universalistic idea, are generally easier to deal with.

The second level of change would be a change in tactics, that is, how the Soviet Union implements its long-term goals in the short run. There are several tactical choices of considerable importance to U.S. policy. One is the question of what kinds of allies the Soviet Union chooses to support—i.e., whether it is pursuing "left" or "right" tactics. Another important question concerns the level of costs and risks the Soviet Union is willing to bear in pursuit of its Third World objectives.

The final level of change can be labelled stylistic: the look and feel of Soviet diplomacy. Stylistic changes are reflected in Soviet rhetoric and in the way they carry out propaganda (also known as "public diplomacy"), and in the sorts of proposals and initiatives emanating from Moscow. This is clearly the most superficial level of change in Soviet policy.

Stylistic and tactical changes are already readily apparent in Gorbachev's Soviet Union. Many observers have noted stylistic changes, reflected in the unideological and cosmopolitan tone of Soviet diplomats, whereas the Brutents-Yakovlev line is an example of tactical change. "New political thinking," by contrast, promises changes

that are much more far-reaching: Moscow by implication has given up both its Marxist-Leninist understanding of international politics and its desire to expand its influence at the expense of other states. A number of developments have already occurred that may suggest changes along these lines, but on the strategic level the returns are not yet in.

The dramatic changes in Soviet strategic goals promised by "new thinking" are unlikely to occur in their totality. In any case, given the rapidity of recent changes in Soviet policy, we cannot necessarily take the present as a reliable guideline for the future. A modification of strategic goals presumably would not take place overnight, and the first three years of Mikhail Gorbachev's tenure may simply represent the laying down of certain necessary political foundations. Future Soviet behavior, moreover, is likely to depend on our behavior.<sup>64</sup> We therefore need a series of intermediate measures or tests for measuring meaningful shifts in the more important dimensions of Soviet foreign policy. Tests of change in strategic goals should provide us with a consistent standard for keeping track of Soviet behavior, and would present a picture of what we might expect the world to look like if the superpower competition were truly attenuated.

The first and most unambiguous test would be a unilateral Soviet withdrawal from the forward positions that Moscow occupied during the 1970s. Beyond the withdrawal from Afghanistan, which has already begun, there are many candidates, such as the five divisions deployed in Mongolia along the Chinese border,<sup>65</sup> the militarization of the so-called Northern Territories, the Soviet bases at Cam Ranh Bay and Danang, or, in cooperation with Cuba, a diminution of military support for Angola, Nicaragua, or Ethiopia.

Many Western observers, as well as the Soviets themselves, have argued that it is unrealistic to think that Moscow can simply walk back unilaterally from commitments made long ago. Concessions, it is said,

<sup>64</sup>Observers who question Gorbachev's seriousness are usually using change in long-term strategic goals as a measure; others discount this as an impossibly high standard—particularly the ending of Soviet expansionism, which few see as a likely prospect. It is not obvious, however, that shifts of this magnitude could not occur. A relevant precedent here might be the People's Republic of China, which in the fifteen years following the Cultural Revolution dropped almost all of its global ambitions, to the point where it presents a relatively small threat to U.S. interests. The Chinese situation obviously differs from that of the Soviets in many ways, but the changes in foreign and domestic policy promised by the current Soviet leadership are no less dramatic than those promoted by Deng Xiao-ping.

<sup>65</sup>In connection with Gorbachev's July 1986 Vladivostok speech, approximately one of these divisions was withdrawn from Mongolia and deployed elsewhere in the Far East. Gorbachev in his December 1988 speech to the UN General Assembly has promised further cuts in Soviet forces in Mongolia.

have to be bilateral; and far from being accommodating on regional issues, Washington has pushed the so-called "Reagan Doctrine." But while it is indeed unrealistic to expect a wholesale Soviet abandonment of their overseas empire, it not unreasonable that the Soviets should decide to give up at least one of their troubled outposts, as they decided to do in Afghanistan. Soviet professions that they want to concentrate on domestic development have little meaning if at the same time Moscow proves willing to "bear any burden" in maintaining the empire handed down from Brezhnev.

A second and perhaps equally demanding test would be the ending of Moscow's traditional ideological war against the United States and other Western countries. While détente with the Reagan Administration has led to a softening of gratuitous Soviet attacks on the United States, the Soviet propaganda apparatus continues to exploit opportunities to attack Western initiatives, actions, friends, and institutions.<sup>66</sup> It is this cast of mind, developed into an almost Pavlovian reaction, which perhaps more than anything reveals the persistence of ideological, zero-sum thinking. It is not unreasonable to look for an attenuation of such thinking in the future. While China does not hesitate to criticize the United States over specific issues, it no longer attacks American policy and institutions gratuitously.

A third and less demanding test would be a Soviet failure to take advantage of a new opportunity to expand their influence at relatively low cost and risk, comparable to the opportunities that arose in Africa and Central America in the late 1970s. The problem is finding situations which are truly comparable to the Angolas and Nicaraguas of the previous decade: the fact that the Soviets have not invaded northern Iran recently does not tell us much about their propensity to help Cuban soldiers intervene in support of a weak African regime, because the risks and rewards are of a completely different order. One possible case to watch would be Soviet behavior in the Philippines, should the New People's Army (NPA) make an open appeal for Soviet assistance—although this too is perhaps a poor point of comparison with the 1970s, since the risks and rewards of intervention in the Philippines are higher than most earlier cases.<sup>67</sup>

A final category of test concerns domestic developments in the Soviet Union. To the extent that Gorbachev's *perestroika* is successful,

<sup>66</sup>A good example of the gratuitousness of Soviet propaganda was the public Soviet charge—subsequently dropped and then denied, after the United States raised an outcry—that the AIDS epidemic in the West was the result of a Pentagon germ warfare experiment gone awry.

<sup>67</sup>The Soviet Union would in any case not be likely to provide direct military assistance before a communist government actually came to power.

centralized institutions are replaced by market ones, there is greater democratic participation in the Soviet political process and increasing freedom of expression, it is likely that the ideological rivalry between the United States and the USSR will be attenuated. Regardless of the way the Soviets describe the role of ideology in their foreign policy (either by asserting or denying its importance), the way that they regard socialism in their own country will inevitably affect their interest in promoting it in the Third World. Comparison with China is useful here as well: the Chinese stopped exporting revolution after the late 1960s when a reform-minded leadership ceased believing that Maoism was the most advanced form of political organization. We can assume that domestic change in the USSR will have a similar effect on Soviet foreign policy. Indeed, at no point in recent history is foreign policy as likely to be dependent on internal political developments as the present.

The extent to which the Soviets have met these tests of strategic change, particularly the first, will be examined in the sections that follow.



### III. THE NEW AGENDA IN THE THIRD WORLD

The tactics of Soviet foreign policy since Gorbachev's rise to power have without a doubt shifted. Putting aside for the time being the question of whether "new thinking" is being applied to regional conflicts in the Third World, there is abundant evidence that the "hard" Brutents-Yakovlev strategy of cultivating capitalist states has been the central focus of Soviet diplomacy. This conclusion is amply supported in virtually every region of the world.

The premier example of this is India. India, of course, has been a steady Soviet ally ever since the days of Khrushchev, and has received favored political treatment from Moscow over a period of decades. Nonetheless, India has been showered with an extraordinary degree of Soviet attention since Gorbachev came to power. Besides troubled Afghanistan, India was the only other Third World country mentioned by name in Gorbachev's address to the 27th party congress in 1986.<sup>1</sup> The two leaders held six summits in Gorbachev's first two and a half years: Rajiv Gandhi visited Moscow in May 1985 as one of Mikhail Gorbachev's first guests, and Gorbachev returned the favor in late November 1986, his first visit to a Third World or Asian country.<sup>2</sup> The Soviet leader visited India most recently in November 1988. Gorbachev used the November 1986 summit as the occasion to launch the "Delhi Declaration," whose ten points rehash many of the themes of the "new thinking" concerning nuclear disarmament, SDI, and the like. Warning that "humanity stands at a crucial turning point in history," the declaration calls for agreements on the complete banning of nuclear weapons by the end of the century, barring weapons from outer space, a comprehensive test ban, prohibition of chemical weapons, and conventional arms control.<sup>3</sup>

Gorbachev seems to regard Soviet-Indian relations as some kind of a model for Soviet ties to developing countries. As he stated in his address to the Indian parliament, "To me personally, it is quite obvious that much of what we call new political thinking manifested itself internationally for the first time in relations between the Soviet Union

<sup>1</sup>See Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "A Third World Policy Waits for Gorbachev," *Orbis*, Vol. 30, No. 2, Summer 1986, p. 357. Exclusive emphasis on India was also characteristic of Andropov.

<sup>2</sup>See Jyotirmoy Banerjee, "Moscow's Indian Alliance," *Problems of Communism*, January-February 1987, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>The Delhi Declaration is reprinted in FBIS-SOV, November 28, 1986, p. D 14.

and India. And the fact that differences of socio-political system and ideology and our national, cultural, and other distinctions have not hampered our dialogue is extremely important as a guiding example for others."<sup>4</sup> Since the visit, other Soviet leaders speaking in Third World countries have repeatedly referred to Soviet-Indian relations as a "model" for Moscow's ties with a developing country.

For political reasons, the Soviets have made great efforts to increase the level of bilateral trade with India. The Indians received a \$1.4 billion package of credits in May 1985, and signed a four-year trade agreement with Moscow in November of that year. Further agreements were signed in 1986 providing for Indian manufacture of MiG-29 aircraft and for trade expansion. But while intentions were good, the underlying economic realities did not permit these expectations to be met. The 1985 agreement was to have doubled the volume of Soviet-Indian trade the following year; the level actually fell because of drops in the prices of the principal commodities being exchanged—oil and tea—and because of a slackening of Indian demand for Soviet machinery.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, the Soviet Union in the early 1980s remained the largest customer for Indian exports, and India remained one of the largest consumers of Soviet arms.<sup>6</sup>

The Gorbachev team has also shown a great deal of interest in the large countries of Latin America. Soviet Latin Americanists have recognized on a theoretical level for some time that the advanced states of the continent were actually at a level of socio-economic development comparable to the poorer countries of Europe, and deserved to be treated differently from the "basket cases" of Central America and Africa. The 1970s saw a flowering of Soviet-Argentine relations, whose economic side bloomed dramatically as the Soviets sought to buy Argentine wheat in the aftermath of the Afghanistan embargo. All of this occurred under Brezhnev despite the fact that Argentina was in the grip of a series of brutal military dictatorships.<sup>7</sup>

It was only under Gorbachev, however, that the Soviets have made a systematic effort to broaden their political base throughout the continent. The Soviets have exchanged visits with officials from a number of Southern Cone countries. In January 1986 the Argentine foreign

<sup>4</sup>FBIS-SOV, November 28, 1986, p. D 6.

<sup>5</sup>See Bohdan Nahaylo, "Gorbachev's Asian Debut: The Visit to India," *Radio Liberty Research*, RL 440/86, November 21, 1986, p. 4; and Dilip Mukerjee, "Indo-Soviet Economic Ties," *Problems of Communism*, January-February 1987, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup>For a good account of earlier Soviet-Argentine relations, see Aldo Cesar Vacs, "Soviet Policy Toward Argentina and the Southern Cone," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political Science*, Vol. 481, September 1985.

minister stopped in Moscow, where he signed several bilateral economic and scientific agreements, which covered machine building, power, mining, and transport.<sup>8</sup> The Soviets received visits from the Brazilian and Uruguayan foreign ministers as well. In October 1986, Soviet foreign minister Shevardnadze visited Mexico City, after which the Soviets announced plans for General Secretary Gorbachev himself to visit Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay (it is not clear whether he expected to visit Cuba, and quite unlikely that he would stop in Nicaragua). This was the very list of countries cited by Brutents and Yakovlev as targets for Soviet diplomacy.<sup>9</sup> Such a visit would have been the first time a General Secretary travelled to that part of the world. The Mexican foreign minister, Bernardo Sepulveda Amor, was given a lavish reception in Moscow in early May 1987, and was received personally by Gorbachev. By contrast, the Libyan foreign minister passed through Moscow at virtually the same time with very little fanfare.<sup>10</sup> The Mexicans have been receptive to Soviet overtures and have endorsed various Soviet international positions, including those on the total elimination of nuclear weapons and Central America.<sup>11</sup> This is of course not the first time that the Soviets have shown an interest in Mexico; relations were close under the presidency of Lopez Portillo, when the Soviets signed Protocol II of the Tlatelolco Treaty and the Mexicans supported Soviet positions on Nicaragua.<sup>12</sup> Gorbachev's visit to South America was delayed by other, more pressing matters, but Shevardnadze in late September 1987 visited Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay, something Andrey Gromyko never found time to do in all his years as foreign minister.<sup>13</sup> In October 1988, the Soviets received Brazilian president Jose Sarney in Moscow, the first such visit from a Southern Cone head of state.<sup>14</sup> This highly visible reception complemented intensive Soviet efforts over the past two years to begin new joint economic ventures with Brazil.

Soviet political cultivation of the major states of Latin America has also led to strong Soviet endorsement of the existing bourgeois regimes there, often at the expense of local left-wing, socialist, or communist

<sup>8</sup>Peter Shearman, "Gorbachev and Latin America," unpublished paper, 1987.

<sup>9</sup>Robert S. Greenberger, "Reagan Administration Gets Nervous as Soviet Union Woos Latin America," *Wall Street Journal*, November 17, 1986.

<sup>10</sup>See Bill Keller, "Soviet, In a Shift, Expands Contact with Third World," *New York Times*, May 25, 1987, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup>See interview with Sepulveda, *Izvestiya*, March 22, 1987.

<sup>12</sup>Unpublished paper by Brian Latell, "The USSR and Mexico."

<sup>13</sup>William R. Long, "Shevardnadze to Begin Trip to South America," *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1987, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup>*Pravda*, October 19, 1988, pp. 1-2.

parties. Thus the Soviet ambassador to Mexico expressed support for the ruling PRI's (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) presidential candidate, who was being opposed by the Mexican communists, while Shevardnadze endorsed Alfonsin's economic policy in Argentina. Shevardnadze even went to the length of meeting separately with Argentina's Jewish community and promising them speedier emigration of Soviet Jews.<sup>15</sup>

The basis for Soviet relations with the large countries of Latin America is primarily economic. The Soviets have expressed considerable interest in the applied technology which these countries are increasingly able to offer, such as Brazilian software or the Mexican *maquiladora* system.<sup>16</sup> As in the case of India, however, the simple fact that the Soviets want a higher level of economic interaction with a given region of the world does not mean that they can call it forth. Even as the political offensive began, Soviet trade with Latin America declined from 3.2 billion rubles in 1985 to 920 million rubles in 1986.<sup>17</sup> Much of the large yearly swings in trade volume have been the result of sudden Soviet grain purchases. It is possible over the long run that the Soviets could settle on a long-term growth path wherein Soviet services are traded for Latin American machinery and technology, but a stable basis for trade has yet to be found.

Despite Moscow's heavy involvement with Vietnam, the USSR has also been active building bridges to the ASEAN states. In place of attempts in the early 1980s to intimidate the ASEAN states out of their opposition to the Soviet-Vietnamese position, Moscow has been practicing "smile diplomacy" here as in other parts of Asia. There has been an upsurge in bilateral visits between Soviet officials and their counterparts in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand. Indonesia's economics minister Ali Wardhana visited Moscow in October 1984; in July 1985 Anatolyy Zaitsev, head of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's Southeast Asian bureau, was the first of several Soviet delegations to visit Bangkok; and Yakov Ryabov, a deputy prime minister, visited

<sup>15</sup>See Ilya Prizel, "Latin America: The Long March," *The National Interest*, No. 12, Summer 1988. Cohabitation with the region's bourgeoisie or even military dictators is hardly a new feature of either Soviet policy or that of the local communist parties. From the cautiousness of the Comintern's first Latin American Secretariat head Vittorio Codevilla through the participation of the Cuban communists in the wartime Batista government to Shevardnadze's current maneuverings, the communists have never wrestled long and hard with their consciences in dealing with non-communists. This is probably the reason why they have been so frequently outflanked on the left by figures like Castro, or the Sandinistas.

<sup>16</sup>This is the system under which foreign, primarily Japanese, companies assemble products just across the Mexican border for the American market. *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

Kuala Lumpur in November 1985. The Thai foreign minister stopped in Moscow in May 1987, where he discussed with Shevardnadze the situation in Southeast Asia, and signed a protocol establishing a joint Soviet-Thai trade commission.<sup>18</sup> In September, Prime Minister Matahir of Malaysia visited the USSR. Matahir also signed protocols to promote expanded trade and regularized political contacts. While disagreeing on the issues of Afghanistan and Southeast Asia, the Malaysians endorsed a number of Soviet positions on disarmament and regional security issues.<sup>19</sup> In February 1988, Indonesian foreign minister Mochtar Kusumaatmaja visited Moscow,<sup>20</sup> and the first of a rumored series of visits by ASEAN heads of state began with Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanon of Thailand some time after that. Other aspects of Soviet diplomacy have been notable, such as Gorbachev's use of the Indonesian paper *Merdeka* to announce the final global double-zero concession that led to the signing of the U.S.-Soviet INF agreement.<sup>21</sup> In early March 1987, Eduard Shevardnadze visited Australia, Indonesia, and a number of other countries in Southeast Asia.

The Soviets have sought to expand economic ties with ASEAN, and have tried to capitalize on the ASEAN states' trade disputes with the United States. Mikhail Kapitsa, for example, offered to buy rice from Thailand after the latter had been hurt by a U.S. agricultural subsidy program, and the Soviets in early 1987 offered to allow Indonesia to use its own space launch facilities.<sup>22</sup> The capitalist states of Southeast Asia are very interested in expanding trade with Moscow: they have few ideological objections to doing business there, and need to make up for a closing American market and dropping oil prices. In spite of this, however, the Soviet political drive has had to contend with difficult

<sup>18</sup>This was the first official visit to Moscow of a Thai foreign minister. The two sides disagreed sharply on the issue of the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, although they agreed to further expansion of political and economic contacts. See the coverage in FBIS/SOV, May 13, 1987, pp. E 1-10, and the communique in FBIS/SOV, May 15, pp. E 1-4.

<sup>19</sup>In their joint communique the two sides agreed on a variety of issues, including the proposals for an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace, a South Pacific nuclear free zone, and solutions to the Near East and Southern Africa conflicts. Matahir did not, however, endorse the idea for an all-Asian security conference modeled on Helsinki contained in Gorbachev's Vladivostok speech. See the text of the communique given in FBIS/SOV, August 7, 1987, pp. D 1-6; and the speeches by Gorbachev and Matahir in FBIS/SOV, August 5, 1987, pp. D 3-8.

<sup>20</sup>See coverage in FBIS/SOV, February 10, 1988, pp. 29-32.

<sup>21</sup>*Merdeka's* leftist orientation may have diluted the impact of the Gorbachev interview to some degree, however.

<sup>22</sup>See Donald Zagoria, "Soviet-American Rivalry in Asia," in Andrzej Korbonski and Francis Fukuyama (eds.), *The Soviet Union and the Third World: The Last Three Decades* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 261-262; and Paul D. Wolfowitz, "Southeast Asia: Deferring Hard Choices," *The National Interest*, No. 12, Summer 1987.

economic realities. Soviet trade with ASEAN from 1982 to 1987 actually decreased by half, to less than \$500 million annually, of which only a fifth are Soviet exports.<sup>23</sup>

The final part of the Third World in which the Soviets have reached out to large, conservative states is the Middle East. The most clear-cut case of this is Israel, where the Soviets since 1986 have been inching forward toward restoration of diplomatic relations. Early contact was made in Helsinki, Finland, in August 1986, and in April 1987 Gorbachev made the pointed assertion at a dinner for Syrian President Hafiz Assad that the absence of diplomatic relations between Israel and the USSR "cannot be considered normal." A Soviet consular delegation arrived in Jerusalem in July.<sup>24</sup> The Soviets have indicated, however, that they will not reestablish full diplomatic relations until there has been substantive progress on the peace process.

Egypt has also been the target of Soviet blandishments. In March 1987 the Egyptian minister of the economy and foreign trade, Yusri Mustafa, traveled to Moscow where Soviet officials agreed to postpone repayment of Egypt's military debt, which stood at over \$3 billion. This provoked comparison with Western creditors such as the United States, which had been much slower in deciding whether to reschedule Egypt's debt. The following month the Soviets reported establishment of a new Soviet-Egyptian friendship society and the opening of Soviet consulates in Port Said and Alexandria. Further high-level diplomatic contacts followed, including a meeting between Karen Brutents and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in January 1988.

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<sup>23</sup>Wolfowitz (1987), pp. 12-13.

<sup>24</sup>See Galia Golan, "Gorbachev's Middle East Strategy." *Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1987, p. 41.

#### IV. NEW SOVIET DIPLOMACY IN THE PERSIAN GULF

Soviet policy toward the Iran-Iraq war in 1986-1988 was a particularly interesting case study in the diplomacy of the new Soviet leadership. The region, always one of traditional importance to Russia, saw considerable Soviet initiative and activity in this period, implemented unambiguously by the new foreign policy team created by Gorbachev. The overall direction of these initiatives—toward the garnering or consolidation of influence with Kuwait, Iran, and the pro-Western states of the lower Gulf—illustrated quite nicely the Brutents-Yakovlev strategy of building ties with the capitalist (or, in the case of Iran, non-socialist) Third World. The Soviets behaved with considerable flexibility and sophistication, as befits their new image. And finally, the Gulf was a good test bed for evaluating the competitive character of the new Soviet foreign policy.

There is a good reason for the latter assertion. Of all of the regional conflicts around the world, the Persian Gulf is the most promising as a venue for real U.S.-Soviet cooperation. Unlike the Arab-Israeli conflict or the wars in Southeast Asia, Afghanistan, or Central America, the United States and the Soviet Union are not locked into highly polarized competitions where by tradition and accumulated investment the two superpowers have very little alternative but to block each other's interests. Indeed, for several years both superpowers in fact expressed a common desire to see the Iran-Iraq war ended on terms that would leave neither belligerent in a dominant position. These rhetorical postures were based on a genuine parallelism of interest. The Soviet Union, which could potentially have good relations with both of the belligerents, was clearly unhappy with a situation in which they weakened each other to the benefit of pro-Western regimes like Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> The United States for its part was less uneasy

<sup>1</sup>Laurie Mylroie, Shahram Chubin, and others have argued that the Soviets benefit from the war and that its continuation is tolerable to them. I believe that this confuses factual result with intention: the Soviets may have been able to parlay the needs of the belligerents into greater influence in both, but the situation is inherently unstable, and the United States stands potentially to gain as well. The Soviets have frequently asserted that it is not good for two potential friends to waste their energies on each other rather than directing them at imperialism, a position that makes a certain amount of sense. See Laurie Mylroie, "The Superpowers and the Iran-Iraq War," *American-Arab Affairs*, Summer 1987, pp. 15-26, and Shahram Chubin, "The USSR and Southwest Asia," in Korbonski and Fukuyama (eds.), *The Soviet Union and the Third World: The Last Three Decades* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

about the mutual preoccupation of Iran and Iraq, but did not want to see either country dominate the Gulf, and was particularly anxious to mitigate the Islamic threat posed by Iran against the conservative Arab regimes. Both the U.S. and Soviet positions, although based on different and in many respects opposing interests, yielded an identical policy preference—a negotiated end to the war based on the *status quo ante bellum*. More so than in other theaters, the possibility of U.S.-Soviet condominium to bring the war to an end was thinkable in the Persian Gulf.

That is what made the Gulf a useful test for the “new political thinking.” Given the underlying interest in ending the war held in common with the United States, Soviet assertions that they had moved beyond zero-sum thinking and the ceaseless quest for marginal advantage over the United States could be made a reality at relatively low cost. This becomes particularly apparent when comparing the Iran-Iraq war to other regional conflicts. To “settle” the Arab-Israeli dispute or the Vietnamese-Cambodian imbroglio would require that the Soviets at some point exert pressure on their clients—Syria or Vietnam—to compromise. Such a course bears numerous risks for Moscow, including charges by old and respected allies that they are being “sold out” to achieve détente with Moscow’s chief antagonist, the United States.

A compromise settlement in the Gulf bore few of these risks. For one thing, Moscow had friends and interests to protect on the Arab side of the conflict, most notably in Iraq, which has been an important Soviet client since the late 1950s. Whereas Iran has historically been an important object of Russian attention, Moscow’s relations with the Khomeini regime have been rocky at best and of a significantly weaker character than with other, more ideologically acceptable clients. One measure of Iran’s status was that the Soviet Union had in effect tilted toward Iraq since mid-1982 when the tide shifted and Iran went on the offensive against Iraq. For the Soviets to cooperate with the United States in bringing pressure to bear against Iran would not have seriously damaged their regional standing, and indeed might have enhanced it among conservative countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

The Soviets, as it turned out, followed much the opposite policy. Instead of trying to collaborate with Washington and the other European members of the UN Security Council, Moscow took advantage of the strong U.S. tilt toward the Arabs in the summer of 1987 as a means of securing an opening for increased influence in Teheran, and to embarrass the United States in its new role as Gulf policeman. Playing a complicated double game of trying to improve relations with



both sides of the conflict, the Soviets sought to weaken American efforts to build a consensus against Iran, while positioning themselves to pose as mediators to end the war. Although the effectiveness of their strategy is ultimately in doubt, the Soviets displayed a highly competitive, zero-sum attitude toward the Gulf conflict, demonstrating that "new thinking" is apparently not yet applicable to this arena.

The Soviets, it is true, were facing a U.S. administration that was itself playing very much a zero-sum game in the Gulf. The Reagan Administration had, after all, turned down the Kuwaiti request for protection of its tankers until the Soviets themselves showed interest, and then agreed to reflagging on the explicit grounds of wanting to keep Moscow out of the Gulf. In spite of gradually warming superpower relations throughout this period, Washington was at no time inclined to cut Moscow into the action or to legitimize its role in the Gulf by its inclusion in a multilateral fleet. What the Soviets would have done if faced with a more collaborative United States is untestable and consequently unknowable. Nonetheless, Gorbachev has been accommodative in other areas of policy such as INF or Afghanistan in the face of a relatively intransigent United States, so it is not unreasonable to look for signs of greater collaborativeness in the Gulf as well.

## BACKGROUND TO REFLAGGING

Soviet behavior in 1987 must be seen against the backdrop of their past efforts—accelerated under Gorbachev—to build ties with the conservative states of the Gulf and Iran. The Soviet Union has always pursued normal relations with conservative Middle Eastern states, having established relations and sold weapons to Kuwait, Jordan, North Yemen, and the Shah's Iran in the 1960s and 1970s. More often than not, resistance to improved ties has come from the local states themselves, which like Saudi Arabia had ideological reasons for not dealing with Moscow. In the 1970s, Moscow's ability to curry favor with them was limited by its sponsorship of two radical states with pretensions of upsetting the status quo in the Gulf—Iraq and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY).<sup>2</sup> Following Moscow's expulsion from Egypt, Sudan, and Somalia, the Soviets placed greater emphasis on

<sup>2</sup>Iraq has had long-standing territorial claims against Kuwait over Warba and Bubyah islands, while South Yemen has supported the National Democratic Front insurgency against its northern neighbor. Both states at times have supported radical insurgent groups like the now-defunct Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Occupied Arab Gulf.

their ties with these two regimes, and began an ambitious effort to rebuild the PDRY in the image of their own society.<sup>3</sup>

This situation had changed by the mid-1980s. Iraq was effectively defanged by its inability to defeat Iran, and actively began seeking the support of the conservative Arabs. Iraqi-Soviet ties had soured in any case by this point over issues such as Iraq's treatment of its local communist party and purchases of weapons from France. The PDRY was stymied in its efforts to destabilize North Yemen and Oman, and its failure as a society became evident in the brief but brutal civil war that broke out in January 1986. The internal Soviet reassessment had in the meantime led Moscow to conclude that the future lay not with small and isolated countries like South Yemen, but with its more prosperous neighbors. Hence in 1985 relations were established for the first time with Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).<sup>4</sup> Moscow and Riyadh continued to dance around one another, and diplomatic contacts between the two countries fueled rumors that formal relations would follow.<sup>5</sup> There were a number of official contacts between the two countries; in 1987 the Saudi oil minister visited Moscow, and in January 1988 the Saudi foreign minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal followed suit. This was the first such visit by a Saudi foreign minister to the USSR that was not in the context of a larger group meeting, and was followed up by a visit from a Soviet delegation to Saudi Arabia—the first since the 1930s.<sup>6</sup> (The Soviets continued this line in their policy by opening diplomatic relations with Qatar in August 1988.)

The Soviets similarly sought an improvement in ties with Iran. They had regarded the 1978–1979 revolution as a highly positive development, but were disappointed in subsequent efforts to turn Iran to their own advantage. The Tudeh (Iranian communist) party's open courtship of Khomeini fooled nobody, and Soviet-Iranian relations took a tailspin following the Islamic regime's crackdown against the party in the spring of 1983. While the Soviets valued highly Teheran's hostility to the United States, they were less pleased with its sponsorship of certain Afghan resistance groups, and by its efforts to unseat Saddam Hussein in Iraq.<sup>7</sup> Soviet commentary on the Islamic Republic of Iran

<sup>3</sup>The Soviets also used this period to build ties with radical states on the periphery of the Middle East, such as Libya and Ethiopia.

<sup>4</sup>For a detailed account, see Stephen Page, "The Soviet Union and the GCC States: A Search for Openings," in John A. Sandwich (ed.), *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Moderation & Stability in an Interdependent World*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987).

<sup>5</sup>For more on early contacts, see Mylroie (1987), p. 19.

<sup>6</sup>Saud visited the USSR in 1983 as part of an Arab League delegation.

<sup>7</sup>Furthermore, the spread of Khomeini's Islamic fundamentalism represented a threat to a variety of Soviet interests whose exact weight was difficult to define.

grew steadily more hostile throughout the early 1980s, culminating in fairly open denunciations of Khomeini and some of the circles around him as reactionary.

Given Iran's strategic position and historical importance to Russia, the Soviets could not permit relations to deteriorate past a certain point. Consequently, the Soviets made a push in 1986 to rebuild ties with Teheran. In February then first deputy foreign minister Kornienko travelled to Teheran for talks. Iranian deputy foreign minister Javad Larijani and petroleum minister Gholamreza Aqazadeh visited Moscow in August, and shortly thereafter were notified that the Soviets would abide by an Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) decision to cut oil production. The Soviets were clearly quite concerned over the contacts, revealed in November 1986,<sup>8</sup> that had taken place between President Reagan's White House staff and Teheran in 1985-1986, and doubtless feared that Iran in desperation might seek further rapprochement with that quarter. They were thus eager to sign a protocol at the end of the year which provided for the resumption of Iranian natural gas deliveries to the USSR.<sup>9</sup> The protocol was followed by a visit to Moscow in February 1987 of Iranian foreign minister Velyati, the first time such a high ranking official had called since the revolution. These agreements and contacts amounted to something less than a wholehearted endorsement of Teheran, however, as Moscow continued to criticize the Khomeini regime for its support of the Afghan *mujahideen*.<sup>10</sup> The Soviets also sought to protect their interests on the other side of the Gulf, discussing further arms shipments to Iraq at virtually the same time as the signing of the economic protocol.<sup>11</sup>

### THE KUWAITI REQUEST

The reflagging controversy of 1987 arose out of a Kuwaiti request to the United States to provide protection for its tankers steaming in and

<sup>8</sup>The existence of these contacts was first publicly revealed in Lebanon and then in the United States in November; we do not of course know whether the Soviets had their own sources of information that would have alerted them to the problem earlier.

<sup>9</sup>The agreement to deliver natural gas had been negotiated under the Shah, but was suspended shortly after the revolution because of Iranian demands for a sharply increased price. The December 1986 protocol was a general commercial agreement providing for expanded economic cooperation in a variety of areas, including banking, transport, fisheries, and technology, as well as energy. See Bohdan Nahaylo, "Moscow and Teheran: Cultivating Mutual Interests Without Budging on Political Differences," *Radio Liberty Research*, RL 47/87, February 3, 1987 (87/1).

<sup>10</sup>*Izvestia*, for example, published an article critical of Iran on December 1.

<sup>11</sup>*Foreign Report*, December 11, 1986.

out of the Persian Gulf, which had been increasingly subject to Iranian harassment. The threat was made greater by early 1987 with the Iranian installation of Chinese-manufactured Silkworm anti-ship missiles on the other side of the Gulf. The request had originally been made of the United States, which turned it down on the grounds that there were legal obstacles to the provision of protection.<sup>12</sup> The Kuwaitis then turned to the Soviet Union, which in late March agreed to lease three ships to Kuwait, leaving open the option of providing military protection for them. Shortly thereafter, Soviet deputy foreign minister Vladimir Petrovskiy was sent on a swing through Kuwait, Oman, Iraq, and the UAE, seeking to reassure these countries of Soviet good intentions.

The Soviet response to the Kuwaiti request was perfectly in line with the new emphasis on cultivation of capitalist Third World states.<sup>13</sup> It is not at all clear whether at the outset the Soviets had any intention of providing serious military protection to the chartered tankers. Their subsequent, militarily cautious behavior suggests they did not, and there is a real question whether they were capable of mounting the sort large-scale naval operation eventually conducted by the U.S. navy. In any event, the prospect of the Soviet fleet protecting Kuwaiti shipping proved highly troubling to the Reagan Administration. In the words of one unnamed U.S. official, "Warships mean a political presence and the ability to intervene. . . . It is an area we have defined as vital to American interests."<sup>14</sup> Explaining that "if we don't do the job, the Soviets will," President Reagan undertook a much more ambitious and visible effort to reflag a number of Kuwaiti tankers and make the necessary large-scale naval deployments to protect them. This move was backed by a coalition of officials in the Pentagon whose primary motive was to forestall Soviet influence, and others in the State Department who wanted to restore U.S. credibility among the Gulf Arabs after their apparent betrayal in the Iran-contra affair.

Like the U.S. Congress and America's European allies, the Soviets were probably surprised at the administration's turnaround on the reflagging issue, and its willingness (in spite of Lebanon) to contemplate large-scale military deployments to the Middle East. The Soviets

<sup>12</sup>Gary Lee, "Soviets Helping Kuwait in Shipping Crisis," *Washington Post*, April 15, 1987.

<sup>13</sup>According to the Kuwaiti News Agency, "Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Petrovskiy said that Kuwait followed a moderate and balanced policy regarding all Arab, regional, and international issues. . . . The Soviet official added that Kuwait's voice is now being heard throughout the world: It is the voice of reason, the likes of which there are few in the world." Translated in FBIS/SOV, April 30, 1987, p. H 1.

<sup>14</sup>Quoted in Bill Keller, "Kuwait to Lease Soviet Tankers; Moscow Weighing Naval Escorts," *New York Times*, April 14, 1987.

could at this point have chosen to try to outbid the United States for Kuwaiti favors, or, more plausibly, approached Washington to try to work out a collaborative solution to the freedom of navigation issue. Instead, Soviet policy adjusted quickly and with considerable tactical flexibility in the opposite direction, taking advantage of what at the time seemed like a heavy-handed American tilt toward the Arab side of the Gulf war to expand its ties with Iran.

This was done in a variety of ways. In the first instance, the Soviets simply refused to be provoked by Iran. On May 9, one of the chartered Soviet ships, the *Ivan Koroteyev*, was attacked and damaged by Iranian speedboats, while on the 16th the *Marshal Chuikov* struck an Iranian-planted mine. The United States in similar circumstances would have been virtually compelled to retaliate against Teheran, as it eventually did when it shelled an Iranian oil platform in October. The Soviet response, by contrast, was extremely low-key. Petrovskiy sent the Iranians a note holding them responsible for the attacks, but otherwise failed to act.<sup>15</sup> The Soviets did send three minesweepers to the Gulf in late May, bringing their total complement of ships to five;<sup>16</sup> but the squadron was not configured to take any kind of offensive action.

Indeed, the Soviets actively sought to conciliate Iran. First deputy foreign minister Vorontsov announced in early June that the Soviet Union had no intention of supplementing its naval squadron further, but would pursue a variety of political discussions instead to bring about an end to the war.<sup>17</sup> A few days later, Vorontsov was sent to Teheran, carrying a plan for a peace conference to be held in Moscow, a proposal which he also made to the Iraqis.<sup>18</sup> The Soviets in addition called for a ceasefire in the tanker war separate from a general ceasefire, a position that favored Iran and was therefore publicly rejected by Iraq. While the Iranians did not take up the proposal for peace talks, Vorontsov reportedly suggested to them that the USSR would veto an American-sponsored arms embargo in the Security Council if Iran would desist from attacks

<sup>15</sup>Aleksandr Ivanov, head of the Gulf desk at the Soviet foreign ministry, warned in a Kuwaiti newspaper that further attacks would meet forceful retaliation, but his rhetoric may have been directed more at the local audience. Bohdan Nahaylo, "Vorontsov's Visit to Teheran: Preserving the Iranian Connection," *Radio Liberty Research*, RL 222/87, June 10, 1987 (87/II).

<sup>16</sup>The other two ships were frigates. Jim Hoagland, "Soviet Ships Boost Superpower Role," *Washington Post*, May 29, 1987.

<sup>17</sup>Flora Lewis, "Soviet Aide Says Navy Won't Add Warships in Gulf," *New York Times*, June 7, 1987.

<sup>18</sup>This information came from Iranian deputy foreign minister Javad Larijani. See Elaine Sciolino, "Soviet Proposes Talks in Gulf War But Iran Is Reported to Reject Call," *New York Times*, July 3, 1987.

against Soviet ships.<sup>19</sup> From the moment the U.S. reflagging operation began in late July, the brunt of Soviet propaganda was directed against the United States rather than Iran, criticizing the United States for militarizing the Gulf and increasing the risk of war.<sup>20</sup>

The Iranians, of course, were delighted by the reversal in the Soviet position that had taken place since the spring. According to Majlis speaker Rafsanjani, the Russians "were fooled" and "took the bait" when the Kuwaitis made their first request, but later "the situation was reversed" and now "the statement of the Russians proposing the withdrawal of all foreign ships from the Persian Gulf is very progressive and no one can oppose it."<sup>21</sup> President Khamene'i explained that

the United States hoped to organize a comprehensive attack in the Persian Gulf against Iran with the cooperation of the Eastern bloc and her Western allies. However, the Soviet Union, which at first was under the influence of this policy, very soon realized that the policy was wrong and adopted a wise policy in the Persian Gulf.<sup>22</sup>

For the remainder of 1987 and early 1988 the Soviet Union continued to play a double game, seeking to ingratiate itself on both sides of the Gulf. On the one hand, Moscow continued to reassure the Gulf Arabs that it sought an early end to the war and that it would continue to supply Iraq militarily. On July 20 it voted in favor of UN Security Council Resolution 598, pushed strongly by the United States, which called for a ceasefire and a political settlement of the war. (A companion resolution was to be considered in two months calling for sanctions against parties not complying with 598.)<sup>23</sup> The USSR cooperated to a limited extent with the Western powers in trying to protect shipping going in and out of the Gulf. In September it addressed a protest note to Libya, in parallel with a similar one by the United States, over the prospect of the latter's delivery of advanced Soviet mines to Iran.<sup>24</sup> On a more practical level, U.S. and Soviet warships on occasion passed information to one another concerning threats to shipping.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Elaine Sciolino, "Soviet Reported in an Overture to Iran on Gulf," *New York Times*, June 30, 1987. Vorontsov also visited Baghdad, where he discussed plans for a negotiated end to the war.

<sup>20</sup>Nahavio (87/II).

<sup>21</sup>Quoted in FBIS-NES, July 10, 1987, p. S 2.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in FBIS/NES, August 28, 1987.

<sup>23</sup>See Daniel Abele, "Recent Soviet Moves in the Persian Gulf Region," *Radio Liberty Research*, RL 307/87, August 10, 1987.

<sup>24</sup>Elaine Sciolino, "U.S. and Soviet Protest to Libya Over Iran Mines," *New York Times*, September 11, 1987.

<sup>25</sup>For example, it was reported that Soviet warships passed information on the location of a mine to the U.S. Navy, which then destroyed it. Elaine Sciolino, "U.S. and Soviet, in Gulf, Show Rare Cooperation," *New York Times*, January 14, 1988.

On the other hand, Moscow opposed the follow-on resolution backed by the United States to impose an arms embargo and other sanctions against Iran for failure to comply with the ceasefire. In fact, Vorontsov returned to Teheran in August, where he joined the Iranians in condemning the "unprecedented build-up of U.S. military presence in the area." The two countries also signed a further economic accord which called for the building of a new rail line and oil pipeline connecting the two countries. Such a project, were it to be realized, would be of considerable strategic value to Iran, by giving it an alternative route to the Persian Gulf for exporting its crude oil.<sup>26</sup> The tempo of Soviet diplomatic activity remained high through the late summer, with high Iranian and Iraqi officials arriving in Moscow for consultations that some in the West speculated might lead to a Tashkent-style Soviet brokering of an end to the war.<sup>27</sup> In the meantime, the Soviets continued to waffle on the question of the follow-up resolution imposing sanctions on Iran, suggesting at times that they would support it, but failing to cooperate with the United States and the European members of the Security Council to push it through.<sup>28</sup>

By late fall of 1987 the Soviet focus turned to a proposal to replace the U.S. fleet in the Gulf with a United Nations force. The timing of this move indicates that Moscow was less interested in collaboration for its own sake than with expediting the exit of the U.S. Navy: there had been no similar proposal back in March when Moscow unilaterally answered the Kuwaiti request for protection. The Soviets suggested at the time of Jordanian King Hussein's visit to Moscow in late December that they would support an embargo, but linked it to the creation of a UN force. This condition was unacceptable to the United States, so no further action was taken in the Security Council.<sup>29</sup> The behavior continued through 1988 up to the final signing of an armistice between Iran and Iraq under UN auspices in August. The Soviets continued to try to score propaganda points against the U.S. fleet presence in the Gulf, for example, by blasting the shootdown of an Iranian

<sup>26</sup>Jackson Diehl, "USSR and Iran Plan Joint Economic Projects," *Washington Post*, August 5, 1987; Philip Taubman, "Iran and Soviet Draft Big Projects, Including Pipelines and Railroad," *New York Times*, August 5, 1987; Claude van England, "Iran Set to Pipe Oil Through Soviet Union," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 12, 1987; and *New York Times*, August 7, 1987.

<sup>27</sup>Gary Lee, "Soviet Role in Gulf Increases as Iran, Iraq Meet with Kremlin," *Washington Post*, September 9, 1987.

<sup>28</sup>For a catalogue of Soviet-Iranian contacts through the fall of 1987, see *Moscow's New Middle East Activism*, FBIS Analysis Report FB-87-10020, October 15, 1987, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup>See Don Oberdorfer, "U.S., Soviets Agree on UN Gulf Effort," *Washington Post*, September 25, 1987; and David Shipler, "Soviet Links Iran Embargo to UN Force," *New York Times*, December 17, 1987.

airliner by the U.S. cruiser Vincennes in early July. The improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations marked by two Reagan-Gorbachev summits in December 1987 and May 1988 did little to induce either superpower to adopt a more collaborative posture with regard to the war.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout this period of waffling on the follow-on Security Council resolution, the Soviets did not give up their efforts to build relations with the Arab Gulf states, nor did their newly created ties with Teheran seem to hurt them. In mid-1988 the Soviet Union made a major marketing effort to sell its advanced MiG-29 Fulcrum fighter to Kuwait, just at the time when a proposed U.S. sale of F/A-18 jets to that country was meeting resistance in Congress.

### SOVIET OBJECTIVES IN THE GULF

Throughout 1987 and early 1988, the Soviet Union played a complicated game in the Persian Gulf, trying to maximize its influence with all parties, while hoping to minimize the impact of the U.S. reflagging effort. Soviet behavior demonstrated that they were pursuing a number of different objectives, not all of them mutually compatible. They included:

- Cultivation of the important capitalist-oriented regimes of the Persian Gulf—particularly Kuwait—in line with the general trend in that direction,
- Increasing influence in Iran, a powerful neighbor of traditional interest to Russia,
- Preventing the United States and other Western navies from deploying in the Gulf, and seeking their early withdrawal once they arrived,
- Seeking a negotiated settlement of the Iran-Iraq war, preferably under Soviet auspices, and
- Minimizing U.S. political influence on all sides of the Gulf.

The Soviets sought to satisfy the first objective, influence with Kuwait, by chartering three tankers in April. This proved to be an obstacle to the second objective, better relations with Iran, and in May there was armed confrontation between the Soviet ships and Iranian forces. The decision to charter the ships also undermined the third objective completely by bringing into the Gulf the U.S. Navy, as well as

<sup>30</sup>The Soviets continued to make economic gestures toward Iran; for example, they agreed to form a joint shipping line in the Caspian in early June 1988. See Suzanne Crow, "Iran and the Soviet Union Form Joint Shipping Line in the Caspian," *Radio Liberty Background Report*, June 10, 1988.



those of several NATO countries. Soviet priorities then shifted quickly to getting these forces out of the Gulf. This was accomplished by tilting away from Kuwait and toward Iran. Over the summer of 1987, the Soviets probably hoped that the United States could be frightened out of the Gulf, either by a Lebanon-style incident involving U.S. forces, or through Congressional pressure, or some combination of the two. Bolstering Iranian opposition to reflagging would contribute to this result. Tilting toward Iran would also serve their objective of building influence with that country, and it would offset any credit the United States gained through its massive show of support for Kuwait. On the other hand, the Iran tilt would reduce Moscow's credit with Iraq and the other Gulf Arabs, and would strengthen Iranian resolve just at the point that an international consensus was building against its war aims. From the Soviet perspective, the latter point would be offset to a large degree by the fact that Moscow would be in an excellent position to broker a political settlement if one were in the cards.

The shift that occurred in Soviet policy between the time it sought to support Kuwait in March-April and its tilt toward Iran after June demonstrates the remarkable tactical flexibility of Soviet diplomacy, particularly when compared with that of the United States. Moscow was able to adjust the priority of its different objectives in less than two months to take advantage of what seemed to be a heavy-handed American tilt into the Arab camp, and begin courting a country that had recently attacked two of its ships. From mid-1987 on it continued to maintain reasonably good relations with both sides in the Iran-Iraq war, trying to parlay its influence with one into heightened influence with the other. The Soviets, of course, have traditionally sought to hedge their bets by cultivating both parties to a conflict, as when they tried to straddle the Egypt-Iraq dispute in the late 1950s, or maintain relationships with both Ethiopia and Somalia during the Ogaden war. The Soviets were not compelled by domestic pressures to respond to Iranian attacks against its shipping, and had no difficulties playing a rather duplicitous role with regard to the enforcement resolution in the Security Council. The United States, of course, tried to play a similar game of secret, two-faced diplomacy by selling arms to Iran in 1985-1986, and it is instructive to compare the outcome of that initiative with the Soviet experience in 1987-1988.

The list of Soviet objectives and their relative priority as described above suggests that the Soviets have retained a traditional perspective on international relations, one that remains very much zero-sum. The Soviets at bottom had two fundamental objectives—to maximize their own influence on both sides of the Gulf, and to minimize that of the United States; in March and April they concentrated on the former,

while from May and June on they worked on the latter. Both the initial cultivation of Kuwait and the subsequent overtures to Iran were examples of the "ceaseless quest for marginal advantage" over Moscow's superpower rival, exactly the sort of old thinking or old behavior that has dominated much of superpower politics in the postwar era. The area of common security needs where the United States and the Soviet Union shared parallel interests was with respect to ending the Iran-Iraq war. This interest may have been perfectly genuine, but it took back seat to other considerations. Furthermore, what effort the Soviets made to end the war was done in the hopes of becoming the broker of a negotiated settlement; Moscow would doubtless have preferred to see a continuation of the war rather than see it settled under American auspices.

Soviet pursuit of a collaborative policy would have involved their early and strong support for an enforcement resolution following Resolution 598, and perhaps participation in an international fleet to protect neutral shipping back in March or April.<sup>31</sup> A successful collaborative effort would have served several substantive Soviet interests, including helping to bring to an end a war which has hurt Soviet interests far more than American ones, advancing the cause of Moscow's Iraqi client, checking potentially troublesome Islamic fundamentalism, and reassuring audiences in the lower Gulf (not to speak of the United States and Western Europe) of the good intentions of Moscow's new leadership. The downside risks would have been minimal: the only country Moscow would have seriously alienated in choosing this course was Iran, which was already a pariah in the international community and to which Moscow had no explicit or implicit commitments. Such a collaborative policy, however, would have required Moscow to forgo efforts to expand its influence in Teheran, a country of traditional strategic interest to the USSR, as well as its pretensions to act as a peace broker. More importantly, Moscow would have had to acquiesce in—indeed, legally sanction—the deployment of American and other NATO ships in the Gulf, a deployment in which it could have played at best a subordinate role.<sup>32</sup> The Soviet Union was more concerned with denying the United States the prestige goal of successfully restraining Iran than in achieving outcomes that were desirable in themselves under American auspices.

<sup>31</sup>Even if the contemplated economic embargo was not enforceable, its unanimous passage (like that of Resolution 598) could well have exerted some psychological pressure on Iran.

<sup>32</sup>It is not clear that the United States would have acquiesced in a joint task force to protect neutral shipping, but it was much more likely to have done so in May or June 1987 than by the end of the year.

With regard to the Persian Gulf, then, "new thinking" was not particularly in evidence. The Soviets defined their interests and goals in much the same way they always had, and did not demonstrate substantially greater flexibility or willingness to compromise with the United States in the settlement of an important regional conflict. This is not to say that there were no new elements of Soviet diplomacy evident there. Highly pronounced was Moscow's desire to break out of its isolated outpost in Aden and broaden its ties to include all states in that part of the Middle East—indeed, the entire reflagging episode began with Moscow's positive response to the Kuwaiti request for protection for its ships. As in other parts of the Third World, Moscow has paid considerable attention to becoming accepted as a "normal" great power with interests in the area. Moscow did not shackle itself with ideological preconditions in dealing with the different states of the region, and in fact was able to deal pragmatically with what it clearly regarded as an untrustworthy, reactionary regime.

Evident also was a high degree of Soviet sophistication and flexibility in managing a complicated welter of competing interests and requirements. To a much greater degree than the United States, the Soviet Union was able to play the Middle East "game" of maneuvering between ever-changing coalitions of states, making no permanent friends or enemies in the process. The Soviets do not have to answer to domestic public opinion to anything like the degree that American policymakers do, and are therefore better able to avoid having to present their tactical choices in moral or ideological terms. This enhances their ability to avoid overcommitment to friends and demonization of enemies. Moscow also proved able to shift objectives quickly and make tactical adjustments to changing conditions, as when it saw an opportunity arise in Iran after the announcement of the U.S. reflagging operation.

A final characteristic of the new look in Soviet policy was the relatively greater prominence of the political and economic instruments in Moscow's repertoire than military ones. It is true that the Soviet squadron in the Persian Gulf was augmented in the course of 1987 to provide protection for the chartered Soviet ships operating there. In addition, Soviet influence in Iraq is anchored by its massive and long-term weapons supply to that country. But the Soviet forces' mission was primarily a defensive one, whose objective paralleled that of the U.S. fleet. Soviet "gains" in this period came not so much from any threat of force as from Moscow's complicated political maneuvering, evident in the various Petrovskiy and Vorontsov missions to the region, and its offers of economic cooperation. This contrasts sharply with U.S. policy, which relied to a much greater extent on military means to achieve its ends.

Indeed, Soviet behavior in the Gulf should serve as a useful caution against the commonplace assertion that the Soviet comparative advantage in the Third World lies in its ability to provide military security, whereas that of the United States is in the political and economic realms. This is true in a very general sense. But Moscow is unconstrained by many of the domestic limitations of American foreign policy, and is therefore capable at times of much greater flexibility and sophistication. Moreover, while Soviet economic resources are more limited than those of America in an absolute sense, it is frequently the case that a small amount of economic assistance will go a long way politically, as in the economic protocol with Iran, or in the Soviet offer to purchase Thai exports mentioned above.

### SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

In the fall of 1987, many observers in the West were willing to credit the new, flexible Soviet diplomacy in the Gulf with considerable success. The Soviets, it was argued, had not only responded effectively to the original Kuwaiti request for tanker protection, but had maneuvered themselves into substantially increased influence in Iran. Indeed, fears were expressed of a broad Soviet-Iranian rapprochement that might have serious strategic consequences for the balance of power in the Gulf as a whole. The oil pipeline and the rail link rumored at the time of the signing of the economic protocol in August were said to give Moscow access to large parts of Iran, and to further its historical aim of an "all-year, warm-water naval resupply center on open seashore."<sup>33</sup> Even if these military fears were not realized, most observers conceded that the Soviets had positioned themselves to act as go-betweens in any negotiation to end the war, being the only major power with access and leverage over both sides.

Speculation of Soviet advances in Iran were fueled by the Iranians themselves. As a result of the reflagging operation and the mining incidents in the Gulf, Teheran by the late summer of 1987 found itself confronting a highly potent American armada as well as the navies of a number of European countries. Coming under implicit censure in the UN Security Council for continuing the war, it would have been very surprising if any Iranian regime in similar circumstances did not try to break its isolation by appealing to whatever outside powers were willing to support it. While the Soviet Union has traditionally posed a greater and more immediate military threat to Iran, the presence of the U.S.

<sup>33</sup>Milan Hauner and John Roberts, "Moscow's Iran Gambit: Railroading a Friendship," *Washington Post*, August 16, 1987.

fleet changed this calculation. Teheran hoped to provide ammunition to critics of reflagging by appearing to vindicate the argument that Iran was being driven into the arms of the Soviets. Consequently, it was Teheran and not Moscow that provided the most information about the agreements reached, most of it quite exaggerated. For example, it was an Iranian source that specified that pipeline and railroad projects were being discussed; TASS referred only to "large scale projects of mutually beneficial economic cooperation." The Iranian oil minister stated that the pipeline could be operational within three months, and that with the U.S. and other Western powers putting pressure on Iran, "anything was possible."<sup>34</sup> It was also the Iranians who spread rumors to the effect that a friendship and cooperation treaty with Moscow was imminent, and that they had started to provide the Soviets with intelligence information.

Praise for Soviet diplomacy in the West tended to go hand in hand with criticism of the American reflagging decision. The United States, it was argued, had broken out of its traditional neutrality in the war and tilted toward Iraq under the guise of protecting freedom of navigation, and had undertaken an open-ended military commitment that it would have a difficult time fulfilling. Although the original decision was motivated by concern over increased Soviet influence in Kuwait, the U.S. tilt toward the Arabs had only served to increase Soviet influence in Iran, a larger and more important country. Where Washington had been clumsy, Moscow, it was argued, had been shrewd, flexible, and diplomatic. The U.S. position was, moreover, quite vulnerable; a mishap comparable to the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut could conceivably send the fleet home in a humiliating retreat.

As of this writing (fall of 1988), the success of Soviet policy seems much less certain than it did one year earlier. There are several reasons for this conclusion. In the first place, the American reflagging exercise turned out to be much more effective than its critics had expected, and succeeded in restoring a considerable amount of the credibility among the Gulf Arabs damaged in the Iran-Contra affair. The United States, early prognoses to the contrary, did not cut and run. After a few initial hitches, the military side of the operation proceeded smoothly, and the Iranians were convincingly deterred from attacks on ships under American protection. More importantly, the United States gained considerable credit with Kuwait and the other Arab Gulf states for the quality of military protection it was able to offer. Against the forty-odd U.S. warships in the Gulf by late 1987, the

<sup>34</sup>"Iran and Soviets Are Said to Near a Friendship Pact," *Wall Street Journal*, August 13, 1987.

handful of Soviet minesweepers and three chartered tankers did not stand up well. In addition, reflagging provided the pretext for considerably expanded U.S. military access to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab Gulf countries that had previously been wary of any military cooperation whatsoever.

It is difficult at this juncture to do more than speculate on the reasons why Iran finally decided to accept a ceasefire in the eight-year war in July 1988. Clearly their central motive was the sudden reversal of military fortunes in early 1988, which allowed Iraq to push Iranian forces off virtually all the territory they had occupied since 1981. But Iran's deep political isolation, driven home by the *de facto* multinational naval force patrolling the waters off its shores, was a likely contributor to the final decision.<sup>35</sup> If it was, U.S. rather than Soviet policy was more effective in bringing about an end to the conflict.<sup>36</sup> In the end, negotiations to end the war were conducted not under Soviet but under UN auspices.

It is clear, moreover, Soviet courtship of Iran had weakened Moscow's standing with the Arabs, and particularly its long-standing client Iraq. The Iraqis had been growing steadily more disillusioned with Moscow ever since the high point of their relationship in the early 1970s. The Soviet effort to expand ties with Teheran at Iraq's expense in the course of the tanker war infuriated the Iraqis, and made them less willing to go along with Soviet mediation efforts.<sup>37</sup> Iraqi foreign minister Tariq Aziz, for example, denounced "the numerous maneuvers that are underway in the corridors of the United Nations, initiated by Tehran and backed by certain countries having interests in Iran, aimed at justifying the Iranian position," going on to assert that "the Soviets have abandoned their objectivity, adopting a conciliatory tone toward Iran and focusing their interest on the situation in the Gulf and the U.S. presence there."<sup>38</sup> Baghdad, of course, remains highly dependent on Soviet arms supplies, and would be likely to abrogate its friendship and cooperation treaty with Moscow only under the most extreme duress. Nonetheless, Soviet duplicity has further eroded Iraq's confidence in Soviet reliability, which may

<sup>35</sup>This is suggested by Iran's attempts to broaden its political and economic contacts with a variety of Western European countries and the United States in early 1988.

<sup>36</sup>The accidental shooting down of an Iranian airliner by the USS Vincennes may have inadvertently hastened the ceasefire decision by convincing the Iranian leadership that U.S. military involvement was deepening; the timing of the ceasefire decision and the panicked statements of senior Iranian officials immediately after the shootdown suggests a relationship.

<sup>37</sup>Elaine Sciolino, "Soviet-Iraqi Ties Hit Snag on Iran," *New York Times*, October 3, 1987.

<sup>38</sup>These comments were made in an interview with *Al-Watan al-Arabi*, as reported in FBIS-NES, October 15, 1987.

have an effect after the war is resolved. It has also nullified whatever goodwill the USSR earned from Kuwait and the other Gulf Arabs by its original offer to charter tankers.

Finally, it is not at all evident that the Soviets will be able to capitalize on or expand their recent "gains" in Iran, or even preserve their existing relationship far into the future. As noted above, the Iranians sought out the Soviets for transitory tactical reasons related to reflagging and the tanker war. Many of the same differences that led to the deterioration of Soviet-Iranian relations from 1983 on persist: over Afghanistan, Iran's treatment of the Tudeh party, and criticisms of the USSR in the Iranian press. Beyond that, there is the Islamic regime's fundamental distrust of Soviet communism and Russian intentions: the USSR remains a satan—albeit not the principal one—in its moral universe. It is one thing for the Iranians to threaten the United States with a friendship treaty with Moscow, intelligence sharing, and military access, and another to actually grant it. Not only would this jeopardize Iran's Islamic, non-aligned, and Third World credentials, but it would give its powerful northern neighbor concrete strategic advantages which historical experience indicates they would not hesitate to exploit. And Moscow's continuing military support for Iraq does not go unnoticed: in the spring of 1988 there were anti-Soviet demonstrations in Teheran to protest Moscow's arming Baghdad with the surface-to-surface missiles used in the "war of the cities."

On the other side of the coin, it is doubtful that the Soviets themselves would want to become too deeply involved with Iran. The Soviets are not likely to want to give up their bird in the hand—Iraq—for a very uncertain bird in the bush. Nor do they want to forgo the opportunities to broaden and deepen their initial contacts with the conservative Arab Gulf states, consistent with the Brutents-Yakovlev line. All of these relationships would be put at risk were Moscow to move to some form of overt military cooperation with Iran. If Moscow's post-Brezhnev reassessment of the Third World has any overall policy conclusion, it is that Moscow should not lock itself into patronage of any one single Third World country, but rather should keep its options open for all comers. This is particularly true of a regime like that in Teheran, which the Soviets know well and at this point distrust thoroughly. Apart from a shared anti-Americanism, whose intensity comes and goes with changing tactical circumstances, there is no ideological convergence between the Soviets and the Islamic Republic, and no reason for believing that the relationship would be more than utilitarian.

Indeed, in spite of the recent improvement in Soviet-Iranian relations, Moscow's past behavior betrays a considerable degree of caution.

The same military extremity that induced Iran to seek weapons from its archenemy the United States presumably has led it to seek Soviet weapons as well. The Soviets, in other words, have had the opportunity to make a concerted play for Iran for some time. The fact that Soviet bloc weapons have entered Iran only indirectly<sup>39</sup> suggests that it is Moscow that has been the reluctant partner. Soviet overtures to Iran should therefore not be seen as the prelude to a major military alliance or influence relationship, but rather as part of a larger balancing act throughout the Gulf as a whole.

The greater flexibility and subtlety of Soviet diplomacy in the Persian Gulf may ultimately not be as great an advantage to Moscow as it appeared at first. Befriending both belligerents in a long and bitter conflict is something Moscow may be able to carry off for a time, but in the long run the conflicting interests may well force a choice.

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<sup>39</sup>The main sources of Soviet bloc weapons have been Syria, Libya, and North Korea; direct transfers from the Soviet Union have been very small. The Soviets could, if they chose, attempt to prevent third party transfers to Iran, although this could be done only at a political cost.



## V. CONCLUSIONS

The answer to the question, To what degree has Soviet policy toward the Third World changed under Gorbachev? depends on the degree and level of change one is seeking.

### DEGREES OF CHANGE

At the most modest level of change, there have been major stylistic shifts affecting the look and feel of Soviet diplomacy. As opposed to the heavy-handed, ideological approach often taken in the past, the Soviets have shown themselves quite sophisticated in dealing with a wide range of Third World states. The Soviet political vocabulary has matured considerably: Moscow has almost entirely jettisoned Marxist or class-based categories of analysis in favor of trendy Western concepts like global interdependence and the mutuality of international security. Moscow has sought to interject itself into the mainstream of international life by applying to multilateral organizations like GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, paying its back dues in the United Nations while reversing its traditional opposition to peacekeeping operations, and seeking to position itself as a mediator in regional conflicts such as the Iran-Iraq war and the Arab-Israeli dispute. These stylistic changes have been carried out, for the most part, by a new, younger, and more cosmopolitan cadre of diplomats and officials, better educated than their predecessors and in many cases very familiar with the West.

There is also considerable evidence of changes at the tactical level, that is, in the broad means used to implement Moscow's strategic objectives. The first of these changes is the increased emphasis on big, geostrategically important states in the Third World—a modern-day reincarnation of the familiar United Front. Moscow no longer stakes as much prestige as it once did on the success of troubled Marxist-Leninist regimes like those in Cuba, Vietnam, Angola, or Afghanistan, but has instead sought to broaden its political dealings to include all significant players, regardless of ideology. This shift in Moscow's choice of allies, as it is understood by its theoretical formulators, ultimately serves traditional Soviet goals of competition with the United States and advancement of Soviet influence, and seeks to exploit conflicts of interest between the big states and the West. But pursuit of this tactic implies significant shifts in the way that Moscow

must do business, away from the heavy emphasis on military instruments that characterized its support for Marxist-Leninist clients in the 1970s, to political and economic means. The new tactic is also in keeping with the secular decline of ideology as a factor in Soviet foreign policy.

The second tactical change concerns Soviet willingness to bear risks and costs of military intervention. Here, evidence that a major shift has occurred is somewhat less conclusive, although sufficient to permit us to conclude that Soviet tolerance for risks and costs has declined. To begin with, there have not been any new Soviet interventions in the 1980s on the scale of the War of Attrition, Angola, the Horn of Africa, or Afghanistan. Of course, the significance of an absence of new interventions depends entirely on whether there have been good opportunities for the use of force comparable to those of the 1970s. A brief survey of the events of the 1980s indicates only two new anti-Western insurgencies of any importance, those of the FMLN (Frente Morazanista de Liberacion Nacional) in El Salvador and the NPA in the Philippines. In both cases, evidence of direct Soviet involvement is ambiguous and the question is hotly debated. But it is safe to say that Moscow would not have supported either in the highly visible manner of the interventions of the 1970s, since the leftist forces involved were anti-government insurgencies rather than established regimes. The Lebanon war of 1982 might have been an opportunity for muscle-flexing by the Soviets, in the manner of the 1970 Jordan crisis; if so, the opportunity was conspicuously declined. The Soviets gave only weak verbal support to their Syrian and PLO allies during the Israeli intervention, and they failed to deploy the Fifth *Eskadra* into the Mediterranean as they have routinely done in previous Middle East crises.

Perhaps the two most glaring acts of omission came in response to Iran-Iraq and Afghan wars. In the former, the Soviets could have played a considerably higher stakes game, seeking influence early on by agreeing to sell weapons directly to Teheran, or, conversely, by trying to intimidate the clerical regime through shows of force on the border or even the occupation of parts of northern Iran. Such a scenario, it should be remembered, was regarded as all too plausible in 1979-1980 when initial planning for the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) was undertaken. At a lower level of risk, the Soviets could have tried to parlay the 1987 Kuwaiti request for protection into a permanent Soviet naval presence in the Gulf. In Afghanistan, which will be discussed in greater detail below, the Soviets had numerous options for escalation in their war against the *mujahideen*, none of which was seriously explored during the first eight years of the war.

On the other side of the ledger, the Soviet military continued to be active in various parts of the Third World throughout Gorbachev's tenure. The Soviets have demonstrated a willingness to escalate the level of violence and material aid at least over the short run, as they did in Afghanistan in the two or three years prior to their withdrawal, and in Angola,<sup>1</sup> Nicaragua, and Cambodia. Soviet aid commitments and military assistance have gone up in nearly all cases, and Soviet military advisors have been drawn gradually into greater involvement in each conflict. The two riskiest military operations undertaken by the Soviets in the 1980s were probably the deployment of SA-5 air defense missiles (complete with Soviet crews) to Syria in late 1982, and the transfer of SA-5s to Libya, without crews, in December 1985. In the former case, Moscow risked a military confrontation with Israel in the wake of the Lebanon war; in the latter, Soviet missiles were injected into the middle of an ongoing dispute between Libya and the United States, where the latter was clearly spoiling for a fight.

Nonetheless, these specific instances broke no new precedents for risk-taking, and in all of these cases Moscow eventually turned away from a substantially higher level of risk. Moscow's moves should be seen in the context of empire-maintenance rather than empire-building. In Syria, Soviet combat troops were phased out as soon as practicable, while in Libya Soviet advisers (as well as naval combatants) were ordered out of harm's way during confrontations with the United States in March and April 1986. Gorbachev and his lieutenants have stated repeatedly that their top priority is internal economic development, and that they need a quiet foreign policy environment in which to carry out *perestroika*. This set of priorities is a plausible one, and there is no reason why it should not lead at the margin to a lower tolerance for risks and costs in regional conflicts.

### THE BEGINNINGS OF CHANGE?

The Persian Gulf in 1987 suggests that in this part of the world, at least, Soviet behavior remains highly competitive, and that traditional approaches to foreign policy persist. But in 1988 a number of developments have occurred to give "new thinking" considerably more reality. Indeed, the Soviets have begun to meet some of the more demanding tests of change on the level of strategic goals outlined in Sec. II, beginning with unilateral withdrawals from several of the forward positions occupied in the the late Brezhnev period. Most important is the start

<sup>1</sup>The substantial escalation in 1988 seems largely a Cuban decision; it is not clear what role the Soviets played in it.

of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. In addition to that, progress has been made toward the settlement of two long-standing regional conflicts, those in Angola and Cambodia. In each of the latter two cases, the Soviets did not play a direct role in bringing about the breakthrough, but probably encouraged such outcomes indirectly.

### **The Withdrawal from Afghanistan**

In deciding to leave Afghanistan, the USSR passed the first and most demanding of the tests of "new thinking" laid out above. The Soviet withdrawal, which began on May 15, 1988, was completed by February 1989. After two years of attempts first at military escalation and then "national reconciliation" that would preserve a role for the Afghan communists, the Soviets in early 1988 finally threw in the towel and decided to leave Afghanistan with no guarantees for the survival of the Afghan clients. In some respects, the post-Afghanistan era has already begun in the USSR. Articles have started to appear admitting frankly that the invasion was a mistake, and the process of fixing blame for the fiasco has started. In the words of one well-known novelist famous for his glorification of the Soviet soldier in Afghanistan,

As the Geneva dialogue progresses, in society the questions grow. They cannot be avoided. They are asked in families and in private conversations, they are beginning to be heard at public meetings, tomorrow they will burst forth in the press, breaking the many years' silence.

Why did we send the troops in? What aims were we pursuing? Did we achieve those aims, or not? What will happen after the withdrawal of the troops? What was the price of the presence of our limited military contingent in Afghanistan? All these questions will be posed firmly, and I predict that the answers to them will provide agonizing grounds for prolonged, unabating polemics.<sup>2</sup>

Already a number of Soviets have publicly announced (retrospectively, of course) their opposition to the war, and fingers have been pointed at Brezhnev and a small circle of leaders around him, most of whom are now conveniently dead.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Aleksandr Prokhanov, "A Writer's Opinion: Afghan Questions," *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, February 17, 1988, translated in FBIS/SOV, February 18, 1988, pp. 32-34.

<sup>3</sup>Specifically, those involved were said to be Brezhnev, Ustinov, Andropov, Suslov, Kirilenko, and Gromyko. See Philip Taubman, "Soviet Afghan Drive Called Decision of a Few," *New York Times*, March 30, 1988.

There are three categories of reasons for a Soviet withdrawal. First and foremost would be the deteriorating military situation in Afghanistan, which has imposed a variety of military, economic, social, and political costs on the USSR. Military costs have grown sharply in 1987, due primarily to the \$600 million in assistance the United States now provides to the *mujahideen*, and qualitative improvements in the weapons reaching Afghanistan which have made air operations increasingly difficult.

A second factor propelling the Soviets out is the disintegration of their Afghan communist base. Never strong to begin with and wracked with factionalism from before its seizure of power in April 1978, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was undermined even further by the replacement of Babrak Karmal in late 1986 with the former head of the secret police, Najibullah.

A third and much more difficult to measure factor would be a long-run change in Soviet attitudes toward international politics of the sort implied by "new thinking." That is, the Soviets may have made an autonomous decision that it is somehow illegitimate to subjugate nations by force, or that they must show greater respect for international opinion.

It is possible to read too much into the Soviet withdrawal decision, which should be treated as one piece of evidence and not proof in itself of the reality of "new thinking." Such a reversal was likely to have been driven primarily by the first two of the above factors, that is, costs and a disintegrating local political base. Such considerations could potentially have forced any Soviet regime from Lenin's to Brezhnev's to the point of retreat. Under sufficiently stressful circumstances, there have been numerous earlier Soviet tactical retreats, beginning with Brest-Litovsk in 1918 and extending through their withdrawals from Finland, Austria, and Manchuria in the 1950s. The Soviets clearly underestimated the problems they would face subduing the Afghans, and the fact that they are now facing up to that mistake does not endow them with peaceful intentions.

On the other hand, we should by no means underestimate the significance of this decision to our understanding of some of the basic underlying principles of Soviet foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> On the level of tactical change, the Soviet withdrawal forces us to reevaluate our earlier assumptions about Soviet tolerance for risks and costs. Even given the accelerated rate of equipment and troop losses experienced in 1987, many observers have pointed out that they were miniscule for as large

<sup>4</sup>Indeed, those observers most convinced prior to 1988 that the Soviet Union would not withdraw from Afghanistan for reasons fundamental to its nature as a state will have to undertake the most serious rethinking of their earlier assumptions.

a superpower as the USSR. In any event, it was argued, the Soviet Union is a dictatorship in which public discontent with the war would have little impact on the leadership.<sup>5</sup> The withdrawal decision indicates, however, that costs have been a serious matter for the Soviet leadership, and that public opinion, particularly in an age of *glasnost*, plays a much greater role than formerly. This is strongly suggested by the evolution of Soviet coverage of the war in the direction of increasing frankness about its costs.

Moscow's behavior in the eight years of the war show a pronounced risk-aversion. From the beginning of the conflict the Soviets had a variety of escalation options. These included such moves as air strikes at refugee camps and guerrilla bases in Pakistan; cross-border raids to seize and hold infiltration routes; provocation of ethnic unrest in Baluchistan and other parts of Pakistan; encouragement of a belligerent Indian posture toward Pakistan or of India's nuclear program;<sup>6</sup> or a simple increase in the overall troop level in Afghanistan. Most plausible would have been a strategy to break the always tenuous U.S.-Pakistan tie through intimidation or threats. Any of these options would have entailed a higher degree of risk for the Soviets, although not one that was unprecedentedly high—particularly in view of the stakes involved. The fact that the Soviets chose not to exercise any of these options indicates a considerably lower risk-taking propensity than was generally assumed in the 1970s.

What a Soviet withdrawal would tell us about Soviet long-term intentions is harder to measure. Moscow appears to have decided that the strategic position vis-à-vis the Persian Gulf provided by Afghanistan is not of crucial significance. Those observers who believed that the original intervention signified the opening move of a drive on Persian Gulf oil or warm water ports will obviously have to assign a lower priority to those goals in Soviet perceptions.

More important is the USSR's willingness to let a Marxist-Leninist regime fall, something that has not been easy for a state which always presented itself as on the cutting edge of human progress. The

<sup>5</sup>Many Western observers, looking back to World War II, retain an image of a Soviet Union that is brutally ruthless with the lives of its own citizens when trying to advance a cause of national importance, and of a Soviet citizenship that is at once passive and hardened to the reality of continuing struggle and war. (For an example of this genre, see Steve F. Kime, "War and Politics in the USSR," *Strategic Review*, Vol. 15, No. 4, Fall 1987.) While such a characterization may have been true in Stalin's day, it seems unrealistic now. (For a detailed description of the various social pathologies associated with the Soviet army in Afghanistan, see Alexander Alexiev, *Inside the Soviet Army in Afghanistan*, The RAND Corporation, R-3627-A, May 1988.)

<sup>6</sup>A new Indian nuclear test might provoke Pakistan to test its weapon, thereby triggering a cutoff of U.S. military assistance.

ideological impulse behind the original 1979 decision to intervene was supplemented by practical considerations as well: the fall of a Marxist-Leninist client state could set an unpleasant precedent in other areas where the Soviets were not popular, not only in other Third World client states, but in Eastern Europe and even parts of the Soviet Union itself. The Soviets tried to cushion the blow by distancing themselves from the PDPA regime ideologically, downgrading it from a "socialist-oriented" country to a "national democratic" one.<sup>7</sup> Even with this downgrading, it is hard to imagine an ideological hard-liner like Mikhail Suslov permitting such a thing to happen. The decision to do so must be understood as a real world expression of the skepticism displayed in recent years in the theoretical literature of the possibility of building genuine socialism in extremely backward developing countries, and a downgrading of the role of ideology in Soviet foreign policy.

### Angola and Vietnam

In addition to the Afghan withdrawal, 1988 has also seen significant progress toward settlement of regional conflicts in Southern Africa and Southeast Asia, which are at least in part attributable to shifting Soviet policy. Just before to the May 1988 Reagan-Gorbachev summit, the Vietnamese announced that they would withdraw 50,000 of their 140,000-man contingent in Cambodia by the end of the year, and suggested that under the right circumstances they would evacuate Cambodia entirely by the end of 1989.<sup>8</sup> In July, Vietnam and its Cambodian client government participated in talks in Indonesia aimed at settling the Southeast Asia conflict. That same month Angola, South Africa, and Cuba announced a tentative agreement on an accord that would include South African and Cuban withdrawal from Angola, and implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435 granting independence to Namibia.<sup>9</sup> This was followed by a formal agreement signed by the parties in December 1988, specifying a timetable by which all Cuban forces would be withdrawn by 1991.

<sup>7</sup>The most ideologically orthodox Soviet allies (including the Eastern European states, Cuba, and Vietnam) are designated "socialist," those Third World allies professing Marxism-Leninism are called "socialist-oriented," whereas other Third World radicals are considered "revolutionary democrats." "National democrats" rank somewhere below this tier, but above "bourgeois nationalists."

<sup>8</sup>"Vietnam Plans to Withdraw 50,000 Cambodia Troops," *New York Times*, May 26, 1988. The Vietnamese had earlier committed themselves to withdrawing from Cambodia by 1990.

<sup>9</sup>See Fox Butterfield, "Tentative Accord on Angola, Namibia is Reached in U.S.," *New York Times*, July 14, 1988.

The extent to which we can credit "new thinking" for whatever progress has been made is unclear. Certainly the "breakthroughs," if they actually materialize, will be due primarily to policy changes on the part of the local actors. Vietnam has been under severe economic strain in spite of its large Soviet subsidy and may want respite from the war, while South Africa, Cuba, and Angola for different reasons seem to have concluded that continuation of the Angolan war no longer serves their purposes.<sup>10</sup> There is no evidence that the Soviets had to resort to strongarm tactics such as arms embargoes or cutbacks in aid to pressure their clients toward a settlement.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Soviet subsidies to both Angola and Vietnam have risen steadily in the past few years. The Angolan settlement was made possible only by the substantial escalation of Cuban involvement which took place in the winter of 1987-1988, and which was in turn made possible only by Moscow's continuing heavy subsidization of both Angola and Cuba. The "moderation" shown by Moscow in this case was more akin to magnanimity in victory than anything else.

Nonetheless, resolution of these conflicts (particularly on the relatively favorable terms achieved by the Cubans) is perfectly in keeping with the overall line proclaimed publicly and privately by the Soviets over the past three years. Even if the Soviet role was limited to comradely advice, that intervention seems to have been in the direction of a scaling down of hostilities, rather than aggravating them as in the late 1970s.<sup>12</sup> Soviet deputy foreign ministers Adamishin and Rogachev have been on and off participants or observers in the two regional negotiations, and have reasserted on several occasions the Soviet desire to see the conflicts settled.

<sup>10</sup>In particular, the Cubans increased their troop contingent from 35,000 to perhaps 55,000 between 1987 and 1988, and engaged South African forces directly. A series of battles at Mavinga, Cuito Cuanavale, and Calueque Dam provided face-saving opportunities for all sides to reappraise their roles in the war. See Bernard Trainor, "South Africa's Strategy on Angola Falls Short, Enhancing Cubans' Role," *New York Times*, July 12, 1988.

<sup>11</sup>Such tactics have been applied to Soviet clients in the past—to Cuba in 1968 and Egypt in 1971-1972, for example.

<sup>12</sup>As evidence for this we can cite Fidel Castro's speech on the anniversary of the attack on the Moncada barracks in late July, in which he criticized by implication the Soviet role in Angola and some aspects of Gorbachev's reform program. His lack of faith in Soviet support is suggested by his statement that "If imperialism attacks us, who is going to defend the island? Nobody will come from abroad to defend our island . . . we must remember that we are not in the Black Sea but in the Caribbean." (Text of speech in FBIS-LAT, July 28, 1988. See also Joseph B. Treaster, "Soviet Tactics Faulted in Angola War," *New York Times*, July 28, 1988.) This was only the most explicit criticism made by Castro of the Soviets since Gorbachev's coming to power, and is reminiscent of the polemics that characterized the Soviet-Cuban relationship in the mid to late 1960s.



In the end, the mere existence of the Soviet example may be more important and influential than any pressure or advice proffered by Moscow. With Moscow decisively cutting its losses in nearby Afghanistan, Soviet clients all over the world have been forced to reassess their assumptions about their patron's staying power and likely future level of support. Both the Cubans and Vietnamese may have decided that there was a strong risk that their patron might soon decide to reduce aid levels unilaterally, leaving them dangerously exposed in continuing conflict situations. It is therefore prudent for them to seek the best deals they can get while Soviet support remains firm, even if this means a short-term escalation in their own level of effort (as in the case of the Cubans in Angola). Thus by their talk about "new thinking" and their actions in Afghanistan, the Soviets may have set off a train of events on the part of their clients that will lead to a further unravelling of the Soviet empire.

Soviet Third World policy has changed in clear-cut ways on both the stylistic and tactical levels. And in 1988 we have seen the first clear evidence of change on the most important strategic level as well. The Soviets have met the first of the above tests by actually rolling back a "gain" of the late 1970s. The Afghan withdrawal suggests, if not a wholesale reassessment, then at least a moderation of both the expansionist and ideological factors in Soviet foreign policy. It is still too early to know the extent to which these trends will spread to other areas as well, but it is difficult to continue to maintain at this juncture that "new thinking" is nothing more than a rhetorical ploy intended to deceive Western audiences.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ARMY POLICY

### In the Short Run

The implications of these findings for Army policy are relatively straightforward. *In the short run*, the threat of military intervention that the United States can expect to face from the Soviet Union should be significantly lower than it was in the 1970s. Even if Soviet foreign policy changes in nothing more than a short-range, tactical manner, the consequences are bound to be good for the United States. Much of what the United States found objectionable in Soviet behavior during the 1970s was its willingness to use military power to help to power radical client states around the Third World that were threats to their neighbors and to their own populations. Expansionism in the manner of the late Brezhnev period seems to be out at present on at least two

counts: economic constraints discourage further unnecessary aid commitments, and the lack of confidence in the traditional socialist model of economic development makes questionable the goal of a communist Third World. This is not to say that intervention is impossible or will not occur under extreme circumstances, when the Soviets feel that certain fundamental interests are being threatened. But all things being equal, the Soviets will think twice before initiating another "optional" intervention in support of relatively marginal interests, as they did in Angola or the Horn of Africa.

The conclusions of this report have implications for Army policy in specific parts of the world. The Army does not, of course, plan extensively for Third World intervention, but may still be required to act in selected areas. The region perhaps the most directly affected is the Persian Gulf. Much of CENTCOM's traditional planning has revolved around scenarios in which the Soviets try to seize part or all of Iran. Southwest Asia remains an area of great Western vulnerability, and in a war it would seem natural for the Soviets to exploit these weaknesses by grabbing oil or launching diversionary attacks. But the possibility of a peacetime invasion of Iran (comparable to the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979) seems less probable than it did a decade ago. Iran is a more important country to the Soviet Union than Afghanistan, but it seems unlikely that the Soviet leadership would want to take on another mobilized Muslim population in the former after having spent so much time trying to extricate itself from the latter. CENTCOM still needs to plan against Soviet intervention, but its emphasis ought to be directed more toward contingencies involving local powers, such as those arising out of the Iran-Iraq war.

The Army does not plan for intervention in other parts of the Middle East to the degree that it does in the Persian Gulf, but even so its interests may be affected by a Middle East war, which may require rapid arms resupply from NATO stocks (as in the 1973 October War), or even in certain extreme circumstances U.S. forces. The Soviets will be even more reluctant to get dragged into such a war than in the past. Should an Arab-Israeli war break out and threaten the survival of their Syrian client (or even others further afield like Iraq), the Soviets will feel compelled to assist them. The degree of that assistance and Moscow's willingness to use threats of direct intervention may be somewhat more limited than in the case of 1970 or 1973, however.

In Central America, the Army plays a major role in assisting friendly governments in El Salvador, Honduras, and Panama, and in constraining the Marxist-Leninist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. The Soviets have, of course, been providing the Sandinistas with steadily increasing quantities of military equipment over the past

decade, and, according to the Sandinista defector Roger Miranda Bengoechea, have promised Nicaragua help to eventually build up its armed forces to some 600,000 men. The Soviets also reportedly promised the Sandinistas MiG fighter planes by 1991.<sup>13</sup> Much of this buildup seems to be intended to deter an expected invasion by the United States, although this degree of militarization would inevitably have consequences for the security of Nicaragua's neighbors, and Nicaragua's ability to support insurgencies in El Salvador and elsewhere.

Although the Soviets may indeed continue their yearly incremental arms assistance to the Sandinistas, the likelihood that they will actually cross a major risk-taking threshold like the provision of MiG aircraft remains doubtful. Both the Sandinistas and the Soviets recognize that MiGs have little military utility in the Central American context, and serve primarily a political purpose of symbolizing a Soviet commitment to defend Nicaragua against the United States. But it is precisely this commitment that the Soviets do not want to provide, which explains why the Soviets have not been willing to send the MiGs up to this point. What they have been seeking instead is for the Cubans to bear the main brunt of defending the Sandinista regime. In spite of Miranda's revelations, it is doubtful that the MiGs will ever be delivered. By promising them so far in the future, the Soviets will have plenty of time to waffle on their commitment. The planes may be sent if it appears that the next American administration has taken a substantially softer line on Nicaragua than Reagan's, but if not, Moscow will have many options for putting off the move.

### **The Shifting Threat**

The real question then is one of long-range changes. Is the current period of relative quiescence simply a breathing space before another expansionist push, or is it the precursor to more permanent and structural changes? If it is the former, and if the current economic reform is at all successful, the United States will have to contend with a much more formidable competitor in the next generation. On this question we can provide no firm answers.

The conclusion that the Soviets are not likely to intervene in the short run does not mean that the Soviets will no longer present problems for U.S. policy in the Third World. It is important to recognize, however, that the terms of the competition are shifting, indeed, that they have shifted considerably already. As the Soviet Union seeks to

<sup>13</sup>Robert Leiken, "Managua and Moscow," *The New Republic*, February 15, 1988.

improve the efficiency of its economy, it will increasingly emphasize a streamlined, cost-effective Third World policy that will draw upon political and economic assets rather than raw military muscle. Arms transfers will continue to be an important source of Soviet influence, as it is in India and Iraq. But direct military intervention, or even logistical support for Cuban or East European proxy forces, seems less likely now than in the previous decade.

Such a shift in the terms of the competition will have important implications for U.S. policy, though not necessarily for those aspects of policy for which the Army bears direct responsibility. For example, trade disputes between the United States and its Asian economic partners provide openings for Soviet influence, as in the case of Thailand. If Soviet diplomacy is going to become more flexible and subtle, then U.S. diplomacy, which traditionally has been prone to rather rigid distinctions between friends and enemies, needs to adjust in a similar fashion. As indicated earlier in this report, Soviet foreign policy is becoming increasingly constrained by internal political and economic considerations. Even so, it still remains freer of such constraints than U.S. policy, which throughout the postwar era has become more and more open to Congressional and other domestic influences.

But if the Soviet propensity to intervene in the Third World is going down, the potency of other non-Soviet conventional threats in the Third World are on the rise. The diffusion of power from the superpowers to smaller regional actors continues, to the point where a number of Third World states have acquired powerful and technologically advanced conventional forces. Examples include Iran, Brazil, Argentina, Israel, and South Africa.<sup>14</sup> The latter two countries are particularly interesting cases, since their military establishments have already sharply constrained Soviet options. Short of using of nuclear weapons, the Soviet military could not intervene against these states with any confidence of success, and this in turn has forced Moscow to curtail the direct military support it might otherwise offer its Syrian and Mozambican allies. Similarly, U.S. problems in finding a satisfactory way of bringing military power to bear against such countries as Syria, Iran, and Libya are well known.

Dealing with non-Soviet conventional threats in the Third World is at the same time easier and more demanding. The military problem presented by a regional power not backed by the USSR will often be less difficult: the conventional forces of Third World states, while increasingly powerful and sophisticated, will never be as sophisticated

<sup>14</sup>Israel and South Africa, of course, also represent potential nuclear threats.

as those of Moscow.<sup>15</sup> More importantly, the United States will not have to be as concerned with escalation as in classical cold war crises.

The problem for the United States is less an operational military one than a political one. The U.S. military could defeat the military forces of countries such as Syria, Iran, or Libya if given the appropriate charter, but such a charter would never be granted. Not only does the U.S. military have other, more important priorities, but domestic opinion in the U.S. requires that actions in the Third World be conducted quickly, with minimal collateral damage, and above all with a minimum of American casualties. In situations where the capture of a single American pilot can mean political defeat for the United States, military power is in effect unusable.<sup>16</sup> While it is relatively easy to rally domestic support against direct Soviet military intervention, there is considerably less consensus over how to deal with local Third World threats.

But even if both superpowers are finding it more difficult to use their military forces directly in the Third World, there will be a continuing need for traditional kinds of military activities—arms transfers, military assistance, and training. In this realm the Army will play a predominant role. Whatever changes have taken place under Gorbachev, the Soviets still remain very competitive around the world, and support a wide range of established clients. Non-Soviet Third World threats, as well as threats from subnational actors, will also have to be dealt with through arms supply and training.

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<sup>15</sup>This statement applies only to conventional military forces wielded by established governments, and not to guerrilla insurgencies or terrorist operations mounted by subnational actors.

<sup>16</sup>For an excellent account of these domestic constraints, see Stephen T. Hosmer, *Constraints in U.S. Policy Toward Third World Conflicts* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1987).